JUST THE FACTS: DEATH AND VIOLENCE IN THE SCHOOLS—PAGE 18

School Reform News

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Increased Choice Linked to Higher Educational Quality

Competition brings greater achievement, lower costs, higher teacher salaries, and more

BY GEORGE A. CLOWES

Exercising educational choice in the U.S. generally requires parents to pay private school fees or move to another school district. Is the quality of public ("free") education affected by the competition from those other schooling options?

Milton Friedman once wrote, "If you're trying to go into the business of selling chocolate and somebody down the street is taking money from you in order to give chocolates away, then you've got a difficult time making a business out of that."

If a few chocolate-selling businesses did offer "chocolate choice" to consumers under the circumstances described by Friedman, would the severely hobbled competition that resulted have any effect on the quality of the free chocolate?

A recent study from the National Center for the Study of Privatization in Education concludes that increased competition, even under such disadvantaged circumstances, does improve educational quality, though by only a modest amount. The study makes the obvious point that increasing the level of competition under such uncompetitive circumstances would be difficult, and notes policymakers are unlikely to pursue competitive reforms since the resulting payoff in educational quality is relatively small.

The study, "The Effects of Competition on Educational Outcomes," was conducted by

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Choice Gains a Foothold in Education Bill

Parents get functional equivalent of remedial education vouchers

BY ROBERT HOLLAND

The year 2001 brought promising first steps in the direction of changing Washington's posture toward K-12 education.

Accountability and parental choice gained a foothold as Capitol Hill and the White House reached agreement on reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, first passed under LBJ in 1965.

Shortly after taking office, President George W. Bush introduced his "No Child Left Behind" plan for reforming the ESEA. Prospects quickly dimmed for provisions that established parental choice as a way to hold schools accountable for how effectively they use federal aid.

Congressional leaders insisted on jettisoning Bush's modest proposal to let families stuck with failing schools for three years use their Title I subsidies to transfer to better private or public schools. To opponents of the plan, that smacked of "vouchers," a politically demonized word.

Nevertheless, the bill Congress finally sent to the President contains a provision that contemplates public money following a child out of a chronically failing government school to a tutor, private or public, of the family's choice.

Some advocates have derided this measure as "after-school choice," instead of the real thing. Nevertheless, it establishes the concept of portability in federal K-12 aid, which could be expanded to include vouchers for paying private tuition, especially if the U.S. Supreme Court upholds the constitutionality of vouchers in the Cleveland case later this year.

Remedial Ed Vouchers

Indeed, Fritz Steiger, president of Children First America, calls the provision in the reauthorized ESEA "the functional equivalent of remedial education vouchers for students." The measure is found in a section allowing parents to use Title I funds to pay for "supplemental services," such as

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Congressman John Boehner (R-Ohio) (left) and President George W. Bush confer during a meeting with congressional education leaders at the White House. In January, Bush signed a measure reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which included testing and accountability measures touted by Bush since the November 2000 election campaign. *photo/Shawn Thew*

RAND Study Grudgingly Reveals Good News About School Choice

Researchers' biggest concern is choice's effect on non-choosers

BY ROBERT HOLLAND

A RAND study primarily funded by foundations that have been skeptical of—if not downright hostile toward—school choice reported many positive and promising results of private school vouchers and public charter schools.

But the RAND authors took such pains to spin the data as tilting toward neither supporters nor foes of choice that the 266-page report generated a spate of anti-choice headlines.

"Our review of the evidence leaves us without a crisp, bottom-line judgment of the wisdom of voucher and charter programs," contended the RAND authors.

"Voucher Study Indicates No Steady Gains in Learning," decided *The New York Times* in a December 9 story. Reporter Diana Jean Schemo interpreted the report to reveal "the paucity of reliable data from either side."

Consistent Progress

But RAND's analysis, titled *Rhetoric Versus Reality: What We Know and What We Need to Know About Vouchers and Charter Schools*, in fact shows a consistent pattern of progress.

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The Heartland Institute
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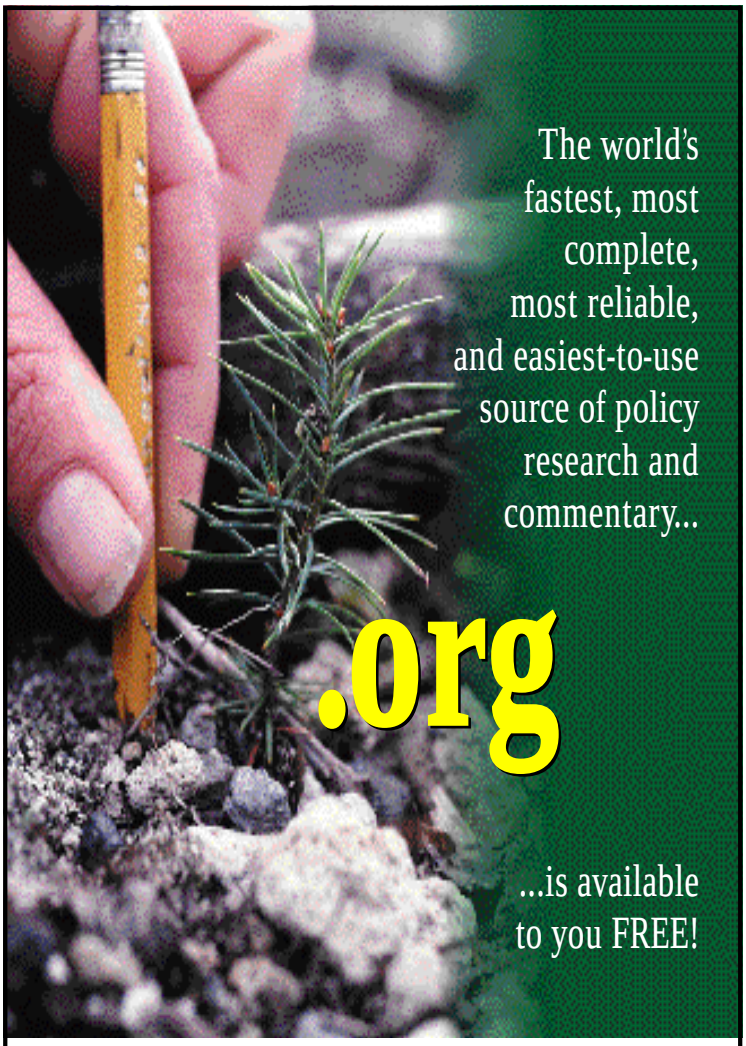
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School Reform News

EDITORIAL OFFICES
The Heartland Institute
19 South LaSalle, Suite 903
Chicago, Illinois 60603
312/377-4000 voice • 312/377-5000 fax
e-mail think@heartland.org

School Reform News is available on the Internet. Point your web browser to http://www.heartland.org.

PRESIDENT
Joseph L. Bast

PUBLISHER
Nikki Saret

EDITOR
Diane Carol Bast

MANAGING EDITOR
George A. Clowes, Ph.D.

ART AND DESIGN
Kevin M. Fitzgerald
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State Takes Over Philadelphia's Failing Schools

Edison role unclear as privatization efforts inch forward

Pennsylvania Governor Mark Schweiker (right) announced in late December the state would take over the troubled Philadelphia School District. The takeover could become the nation's largest experiment in school privatization. *file photo/Schweiker Web site*

BY GEORGE A. CLOWES

At 6:30 p.m. on December 21, 2001, Pennsylvania Education Secretary Charles Zogby signed a Declaration of Distress for the Philadelphia School District, triggering the formation of a School Reform Commission to oversee the troubled public school system.

Less than six hours later, at 12:01 a.m., on Saturday, December 22, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania turned over operations of the school district to the Commission, under the leadership of interim chairman James E. Nevels, a local civic leader and entrepreneur. The takeover could become the nation's largest experiment in school privatization, but it faces fierce opposition.

A five-member Reform Commission was in place by the third week in January, with two members appointed by Philadelphia Mayor John Street and three appointed by Pennsylvania Governor Mark Schweiker. The Commission will decide which schools are to be turned over to private education companies and will negotiate contracts with those companies.

Although Edison Schools, Inc. had been involved in developing privatization options for the district, the company's ultimate role will be decided by the Commission rather than interim chairman Nevels, as was called for initially.

Under the last-minute agreement hammered out between the governor and the mayor, the city has to put up an additional $45 million for the schools instead of the $15 million initially offered; the state will provide an additional $75 million. In return, the mayor gets to appoint two commission members rather than just one under the governor's initial plan.

"Mayor Street and I realized that with nearly six out of 10 children failing reading and math, this is no time to continue the status quo or apply 'Band-Aid' solutions," said the Republican governor in announcing the accord and appointment of Nevels on December 21.

The basic mechanism for the takeover was developed by the state legislature in April 1998 in response to a threat by then-superintendent David Hornbeck to shut down the city's public schools. (See "Philadelphia Schools Face State Takeover," *School Reform News*, June 1998.)

> **"Mayor [John] Street and I realized that with nearly six out of 10 children failing reading and math, this is no time to continue the status quo or apply 'Band-Aid' solutions."**
>
> MARK SCHWEIKER
> GOVERNOR, PENNSYLVANIA

The 1998 takeover plan called for putting the district under the control of a School Reform Commission whose Chief Executive Officer could hire non-certified staff, suspend compliance with state mandates, reconstitute troubled schools by reassigning or firing staff, hire for-profit firms to manage some schools, convert others to charter schools, and reallocate and redistribute school district resources. However, Nevels must defer contract approval to the full commission.

"Education and opportunity are inseparable," declared Nevels. "It is my fervent belief that all children, especially those in the largest school district in the Commonwealth, should be afforded the same opportunities that I had. Those children will become my children."

Nevels has served for over three years on the Chester Upland School District's Board of Control, where Edison now runs nine of the 10 schools. Last summer, former Governor Tom Ridge awarded a $2.7 million contract to Edison to study and report on the Philadelphia School District.

The company's recommendations involved turning over management of the district and a number of individual schools to private companies. However, Street and his allies have forced Schweiker to back away from a number of Edison's recommendations. (See "Philadelphia Mayor and Unions Defeat 'Bold' School Reform Plans," *School Reform News*, January 2002.)

"I understand the reluctance and uncertainty that's out there," said Schweiker, calling on "teachers, staff, students, and parents to work with the Commission to give this new course a chance to succeed."

While Street also said the partnership "holds great, great promise for our children," Schweiker's reform efforts face both overt and covert opposition. As a December 3 *Wall Street Journal* editorial noted, there is much to protest about a public school system where 176 out of 264 schools are on the failing list and half of all high school students drop out. But the protests by teachers, parents, students, and community activists have been *against* reform.

"What we really need is $3,000 to $4,000 more a student," long-time teacher Lou Lessick told the *Philadelphia Daily News*. The district's $1.7 billion budget currently delivers about $8,100 per student and runs a deficit of $1,000 per student.

On December 18, a combination of labor unions and community groups called the Coalition to Keep Our Public Schools Public filed a lawsuit to stop the state from signing a contract for Edison Schools to manage city schools. The Philadelphia Federation of Teachers vowed to challenge the takeover, and Congressman Chaka Fattah (D-Pennsylvania) called for an investigation into the performance of Edison Schools.

Street's credibility as a school reformer came under severe scrutiny in mid-December when Philadelphia's watchdog newspapers published details of a secret report that described how the mayor could "cripple the school district's ability to function" if the state took over. The confidential memo, dated November 28—when Street was urging Schweiker to cooperate—outlines a battle plan for destroying any attempt to bring change to the school system, through a combination of lawsuits, manipulation of personnel, and other actions that would "accelerate Edison's anticipated failure."

Although Street requested the secret report, he said he would never implement its recommendations.

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FOOTHOLD continued from page 1

tutoring, after-school services, and summer programs of the family's choosing. Significantly, parents would be able to obtain subsidized help for their children from private, faith-based providers.

New Hampshire Senator Judd Gregg, ranking Republican Member of the Senate Education Committee and a leading proponent of portability, saw this measure of choice as "a significant breakthrough [that] represents the first step to providing parents with true choice in the education of their children. Increased supplemental services will have a fundamental impact on the way low-income children are educated in the public school systems."

The original Bush bill would have allowed vouchers only after testing had documented a school's chronic failure over a three-year period. Significantly, the House-Senate Education Conference Committee, chaired by Representative John Boehner (R-Ohio), made the supplemental services effective for schools that have already been identified as failing under existing Title I evaluations. That means parents at as many as 3,000 public schools may be able to use $500 to $1,000 per child to purchase tutorial or other extra help as early as the fall of 2002.

Schools on the brink of failure would have to set aside 20 percent of their Title I money for parents to use in selecting supplemental services, should the schools not improve. In addition, the agreement will allow students stuck in dangerous schools, or students who have been the victims of crime, to transfer to a charter school or a regular public school.

Failing Schools Trigger Choice

The new ESEA requires states to test students annually in grades 3-8 in reading and mathematics. States will use tests of their choosing that are linked to their own standards. They must disaggregate results by population subgroups and furnish that information to parents and the general public.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)—which has been a voluntary survey of student knowledge since 1969—will be administered to small samples of students in each state for grades 4 and 8 reading and math every other year as a means of confirming progress reported by the states.

A school failing for two consecutive years to make adequate progress would be required to offer public school choice, including transportation. Failure for a third year would mean parents would be able to buy supplemental services with their Title I subsidies.

Although the law specifically prohibits federally sponsored national testing, a federally controlled curriculum, or any mandatory national teacher test or certification, some grassroots activists fear the new bill takes further steps in those directions, which began in earnest with the 1994 ESEA reauthorization and Goals 2000.

For his part, Bush envisions the test data as a force for grassroots change. Early in the battle for "No Child Left Behind," he stated:

> The greatest benefit of testing—with the power to transform a school or system—is the information it gives to parents.…Armed with that information, parents will have the leverage to force reform.…But reform also requires options. Monopolies seldom change on their own—no matter how good the intentions of those who lead them. Competition is required to jolt a bureaucracy out of its lethargy.

Principle of Parental Choice

The education bill was the second surprising—albeit modest—federal victory in 2001 for the principle of parental choice in education.

The first came with congressional enactment of the tax bill also championed by Bush. The law expanded tax-advantaged Education Savings Accounts (ESAs) to cover expenses connected with private or public schooling of children in kindergarten through grade 12. Hitherto, ESAs had been restricted to the costs of higher education.

The new law increases the annual limit on contributions to an ESA—sometimes called an education IRA—from $500 to $2,000. They will bear the name Coverdell ESAs in honor of the late Paul Coverdell, the United States Senator from Georgia who worked for federal ESAs for many years.

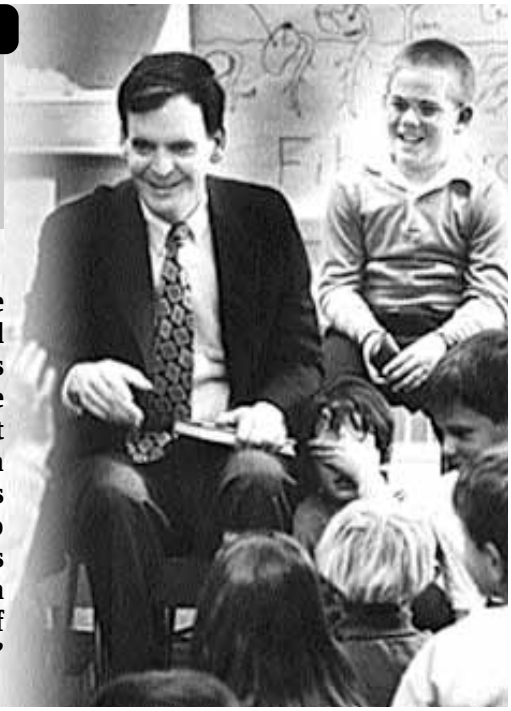
Bilingual Education

The new ESEA also contains reforms of federal bilingual education programs that embrace the principle of choice. Parents gain the right to remove their child immediately from bilingual education if they conclude the child is not being taught English promptly. States must show they are making significant progress toward improving English fluency or risk losing their federal funds.

The new ESEA eliminates the requirement that at least 75 percent of federal funds be reserved for programs that teach in the students' non-English native language. Instead, states will receive formula grants they can use as they see fit. (See "English Learners Not Left Behind," *School Reform News*, January 2002.)

For more information…

WWW The complete text of the final Education Reauthorization Bill conference report (HR1)—all 1,184 pages—is available at the House Rules Committee's Web site at **www.house.gov/rules/hr0001cr.pdf**.



"New Hampshire Senator Judd Gregg . . . saw this measure of choice as 'a significant breakthrough [that] represents the first step to providing parents with true choice in the education of their children.'"

Reading Instruction

In addition, the revamped ESEA also embraces Reading First, which will help school districts set up research-based—i.e., phonetics-based—instruction in K-3 plus aid in early identification and intervention with children from high-poverty areas who lack reading readiness.

Another reform consolidates several teacher programs to allow local school systems to pursue such promising approaches as alternative teacher certification, tenure reform, merit pay, teacher testing, and aid for teachers to seek professional development.

Robert Holland is a senior fellow at the Lexington Institute, a public policy think tank in Arlington, Virginia. His email address is rholl1176@yahoo.com.

A Costly Step Towards Reform

BY ROBERT HOLLAND

For Americans who favor limited government, and who acknowledge that regulation does not necessarily result in school improvement, Congress's final reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in December perpetuates some undesirable trends, as well as taking some welcome steps towards reform.

Heritage Foundation analyst Krista Kafer notes that in return for the bill's moderate improvements to the way federal aid to public education is administered, the ESEA will cost taxpayers $26.3 billion, if fully appropriated, in its first year. That cost could climb to more than $37 billion per annum by the end of the five-year authorization—triple the authorized spending for the 1994 ESEA.

Since 1965, the ESEA has burgeoned from 34 pages to more than 1,100 pages in the new enactment. The number of programs ESEA entails has increased from six to 60.

Despite all that, more than half of disadvantaged children scored below the bare-bones "basic" level on the most recent NAEP reading, math, and science tests. In addition, the achievement gap between poor and better-off children actually widened during the 1990s, even though the very purpose of Title I is to narrow the gap.

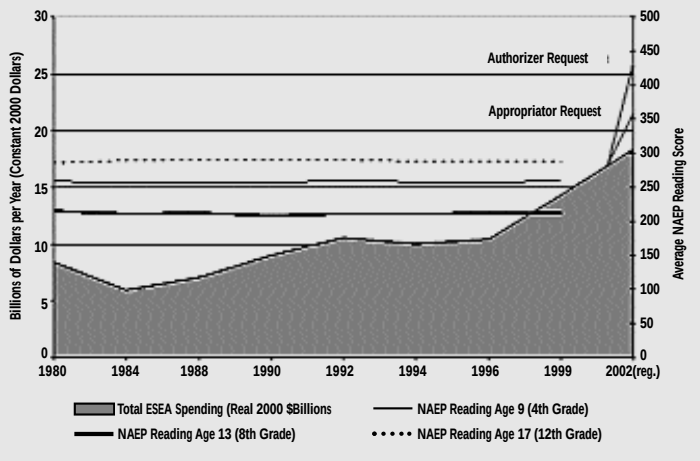
Parental choice advocates are hoping the moderate reforms achieved in the ESEA reauthorization will mark the start of a turn-around in those grim trends and lead to further reforms based on choice and accountability.

Robert Holland is a senior fellow at the Lexington Institute, a public policy think tank in Arlington, Virginia. His email address is rholl1176@yahoo.com.

For more information…

WWW The Heritage Foundation's December 13, 2001 evaluation of the final bill—"A Small but Costly Step Toward Reform: The Conference Education Bill, " by Senior Policy Analyst Krista Kafer—is available at Heritage's Web site at **www.heritage.org/shorts/20011213education.html**.

Total ESEA Spending and Reading Achievement, 1980-2002



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What Do State Tests Measure?

A cautionary tale from Illinois

BY DAWN EARL

By linking federal resources to school performance, the recently revised Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) has generated considerable optimism that additional resources will finally produce the desired outcome of improved student achievement against state academic standards.

However, pessimists point out that many states still have not met the core accountability requirements of a similar revision to the ESEA approved by Congress in 1994—yet they have not been sanctioned for that failure.

Worse still, recent evidence from Illinois indicates student performance on state-designed tests bears no relationship to changes in state educational standards.

The education bill approved by Congress last year and signed by President George W. Bush in January requires each state to test students in grades 3-8 annually against the state's own standards. The bill also calls for the reporting of both aggregate and disaggregated test results to parents and the general public, giving parents and taxpayers information on how individual schools are performing in comparison to schools in similar circumstances.

Standards, Tests, Report Cards Questioned

Illinois has state educational standards (Illinois Learning Standards, ILS), state tests (Illinois Standards Achievement Test, ISAT), and school report cards to provide a summary of school performance to the public.

Average ISAT test scores by school are not reported to Illinois parents or the public. The state report cards thus do not allow parents to determine how well their child's school is performing relative to other schools in the area or across the state.

It's not only the report cards that are weak. Researchers have been unable to find a statistically significant relationship between implementation of the state standards and student performance on the state test, leading some to wonder whether state test results are meaningful. And the standards themselves have been questioned by at least two organizations, who find the standards inadequate in several respects.

The ILS, adopted in 1997 as the state's response to the national standards movement, are intended to define the knowledge and skills all Illinois public school students are expected to possess. The standards were not enthusiastically embraced by all.

A panel of seven experts commissioned by the Illinois Family Institute found the ILS lacking in subject area content with an over-emphasis on the "process" of teaching. In addition, the ILS draft came under criticism from national experts for such lapses as omitting mention of Illinois' favorite son, Abraham Lincoln, in the social science standards.

In a wide-ranging appraisal of subject standards from 47 states plus the District of Columbia, the Fordham Foundation in 1998 gave only a C- to Illinois standards overall. It rated the June 1997 Draft Illinois Social Science standards as "useless."

Test Results Difficult to Interpret

The state test that preceded the ISAT, the Illinois Goals Assessment Program (IGAP), was used from 1985 until 1998. The costly switch to the ISAT was justified as a way to align the state test with the state learning standards. As then-State Superintendent Max McGee declared in 1999, when the ISAT debuted, "unless we deliver assessment results in a manner directly related to the standards, the standards will not be effectively implemented."

IGAP test results were reported annually as actual scores. Newspapers and organizations, such as the Illinois Tax Foundation, routinely ranked schools by average test scores and per-student spending to provide the public with information on how their local school was performing relative to others with similar demographics.

But McGee, contending such rankings were unfair and misleading, eliminated the public reporting of actual scores when ISAT was implemented. He claimed the change would enhance standards implementation throughout Illinois.

While individual student ISAT scores are still provided to the parents and local schools, the schools' average scores are not shared with the public. The published test "results" are simply the percentages of students who exceed, meet, or fail to meet state standards in various subjects, as well as the percentage who score so low as to trigger an academic warning.

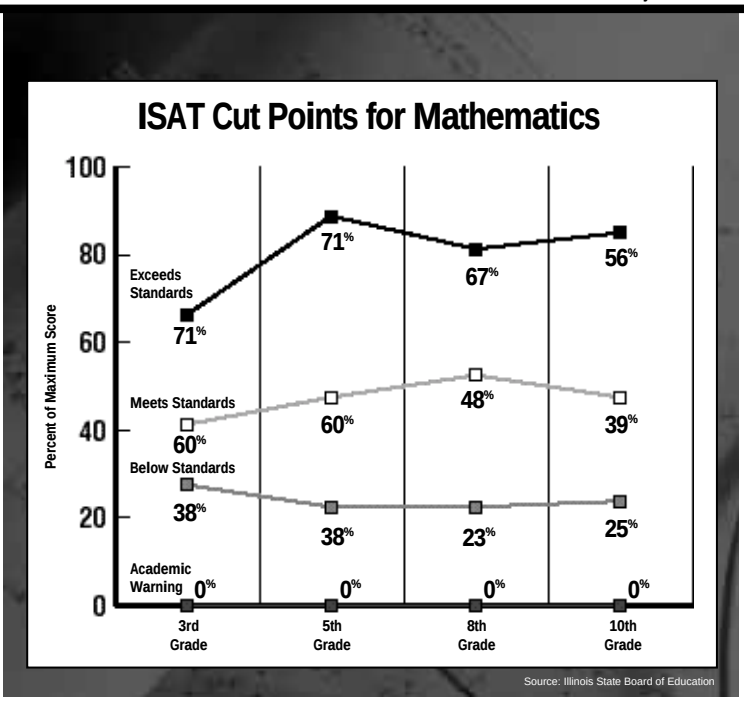
"[R]ecent evidence from Illinois indicates student performance on state-designed tests bears no relationship to changes in state educational standards."

For example, the Illinois State Board of Education reported that 74 percent of third-grade students met or exceeded state standards in mathematics in 2001. But how is the public to interpret this result? How many correct answers must a student get to meet state standards, or to exceed state standards? According to ISBE documents, this varies by grade level and by subject.

Measuring Against the Standards

The ISBE Web site provides a separate scoring table for each of the ISAT subtests: reading, writing, mathematics, science, and social science. Each table defines the four performance ratings—exceed, meet, below, and academic warning—in terms of a range of scores at each grade level. These ranges vary from subtest to subtest and from grade level to grade level. In other words, "meets standards" has a different definition for each grade level and subtest.

For example, a mathematics subtest score of 185 (81.3 percent of the maximum score in the 120-200 point scale) merits an "exceeds standards" rating for a third-grader; a "meets standards" rating for a fifth-grader; an "exceeds standards" rating for an eighth-grader; and a "meets standards" rating for a tenth-grader.



The minimum mathematics score to achieve a "meets standards" rating is 153 (41.3 percent) for third-graders; 158 (47.5 percent) for fifth-graders; 162 (52.5 percent) for eighth-graders; and 158 (47.5 percent) for tenth-graders.

According to ISBE documents, the ranges for each of the performance ratings were established not by statistical analysis but by a "standard-setting procedure," whereby educators wrote performance definitions for each subtest at each performance level. Those definitions then were "used as the foundation for determining the three cut points (Exceeds/Meets, Meets/Below, and Below/Academic Warning)."

Test Scores and State Standards

The ISBE has been funding a four-year statistical analysis project to examine the relationship between implementation of the Illinois Learning Standards and student performance on the ISAT.

The study's third-year report, released last August, described how "teachers and principals across the state are using state learning standards to focus and give meaning to their school improvement efforts," and to affect professional development, curriculum development, and classroom assessment practices. Nevertheless, the report's conclusions seriously question the value of the ISAT.

"At this time, no significant, statistical relationship can be detected between the changes in ISAT performance and changes in ILS," the report concluded. In fact, "disentangling the unique contribution of ILS to improving student learning will likely be a near impossibility in a study of this scope and duration," noted the report's authors. They proposed another ISBE study to identify the "intervenable" factors—including ILS implementation—associated with the "complex phenomena of student achievement."

In December 2001, the ISBE issued a six-month $125,000 consulting contract to research ways to close the testing "achievement gap." The contract went to former state superintendent McGee, who oversaw the transition to the ISAT and was directly responsible for the change in reporting ISAT results.

Dawn Earl is director of education policy for the Illinois Family Institute. She has worked as a classroom teacher, curriculum supervisor and administrator, and is a former board member of Community Unit School District 200 in Wheaton, Illinois.

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"This study confirms what choice parents already know: School choice works."

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WWW The RAND report by Brian Gill, Michael Timpane, Karen Ross, and Dominic Brewer, *Rhetoric Versus Reality: What We Know and What We Need to Know About Vouchers and Charter Schools*, is available on RAND's Web site at **www.rand.org/publications/MR/MR1118**.

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Consider these findings in the RAND report:

- Parental satisfaction levels "are high in virtually all voucher and charter programs studied, indicating that parents are happy with the school choices made available by the programs." In economics, customer satisfaction is a key component of quality. In education, practically everyone agrees parental engagement is vital to raising school quality.
- Early data for small-scale, experimental, privately funded voucher initiatives targeted to low-income families show "modest" achievement benefits for African-American children after just one or two years when compared with pupil achievement in local public schools.
- While achievement results from the nation's 2,400 public charter schools are "mixed," they suggest "charter-school performance improves after the first year of operation." Considering charter schools frequently draw students who have had difficulties in regular government-run schools, that finding is of no small significance.
- School choice programs expressly designed with family-income qualifications "have succeeded in placing low-income, low-achieving, and minority students in voucher schools."
- In segregated communities where racial isolation in public schools is high, "targeted voucher programs may modestly increase racial integration" because they put voucher children in schools that are "less uniformly minority," without reducing whatever degree of integration exists in the public schools they left.
- Most charter schools have racial/ethnic distributions similar to those of regular public schools. However, noted RAND, in some states there are charter schools that serve less integrated, more racially homogeneous populations. The researchers did not explain that in some states—North Carolina, for example—the phenomenon of less-integrated charter schools has occurred because African-American parents have taken their children out of failing public schools en masse, enrolling them in better-performing charter schools where that option is available.

"This study confirms what choice parents already know: School choice works," said Clint Bolick, vice president of the Washington, DC-based Institute for Justice, which will represent voucher parents in the landmark Cleveland case when the U.S. Supreme Court hears oral arguments February 20.

"All the evidence so far suggests that choice is a life-saver for low-income and minority children who otherwise lack educational opportunities. There is no evidence that it harms students in traditional public schools."

Fear of the Unknown

RAND team researchers Brian Gill, Michael Timpane, Karen Ross, and Dominic Brewer contended the "unknowns" about choice far exceed the "knowns." One of the unknowns of most concern to them was the effect of choice on the "non-choosers"—those students "left behind" in public schools after other children have left for voucher or charter schools.

Yet, after a tedious examination of evidence seeking to debunk research showing a salutary effect on student achievement of Florida's vouchers, the RAND researchers "conclude that Florida's A+ Accountability system induced modest short-run improvements in the scores of low-performing schools in writing and probably in math as well."

That is, the Florida voucher program improved the scores of non-choosers, enrolled in schools that improved in large measure because of the mere threat of state-issued vouchers.

Further Research Recommended

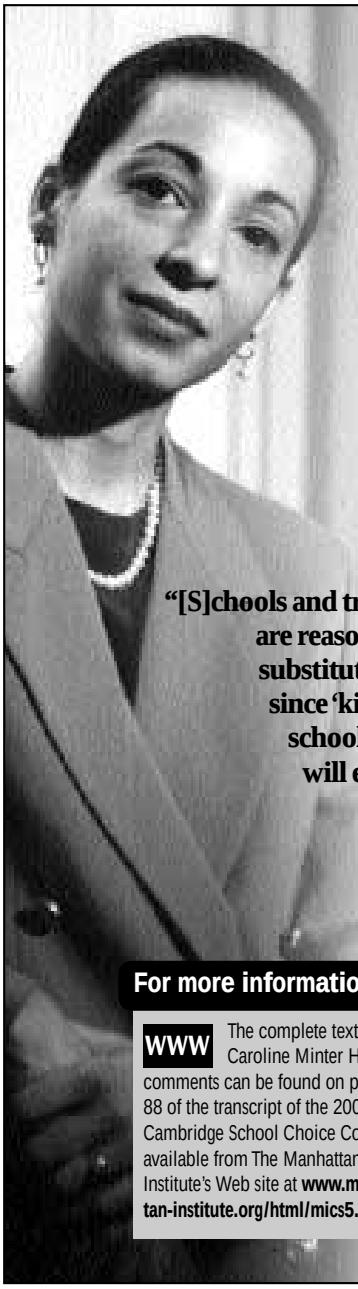
In the final analysis, RAND's questioning of the sufficiency of evidence could be a boon to the choice movement.

The study ended by throwing RAND's weight behind further, extensive experimentation with well-funded and well-designed voucher and charter programs. That would ensure stable growth for the movement … because once parents have school choice, they don't want to give it up.

Launching new and larger-scale experiments with school choice would be clearly contrary to the wishes of choice foes like Jack Jennings of the Washington-based Center on Education Policy. Jennings told *The New York Times* the RAND report meant "let's get on to real school reform, to things that we know for sure help children achieve better: all-day kindergarten for low-income children, better teachers for schools in poverty, and smaller classes." The research about such initiatives is, of course, decidedly mixed.

The RAND study was funded by the Gund Foundation, the Spencer Foundation, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and the Carnegie Corporation of New York.

Robert Holland is a senior fellow at the Lexington Institute, a public policy think tank in Arlington, Virginia. His email address is rholl1176@yahoo.com.



School Choice and Job Training

Similar aims, different evaluations

What if, for a moment, we look at publicly funded school choice programs as "government-sponsored training programs"? After all, the U.S. government and many state governments sponsor training programs and give people money to attend them.

That's what Harvard University economics professor Caroline Minter Hoxby invited the audience to do at a school choice conference in early 2000. She wanted her audience to evaluate the gains achieved by the private voucher program in Dayton, Ohio using the same measures by which other, similar government programs are evaluated.

"[S]chools and training programs are reasonably considered substitutes for each other, since 'kids who get out of school and cannot read will eventually end up in these training programs.'"

Hoxby pointed out that schools and training programs are reasonably considered substitutes for each other, since "kids who get out of school and cannot read will eventually end up in these training programs."

What Constitutes a "Win"?

With a participation cost of only about $2,200 for 180 days of "training," the Dayton voucher program produced an average gain among "trainees" of three National Percentile Ranking points in reading and six in math. Such test-score gains would produce a 10 to 15 percent wage gain for the trainee, Hoxby said.

"This is the highest benefit [to] cost ratio that I was able to find," reported Hoxby. "I compared this ratio with a Department of Labor write-up on all the training programs sponsored over the past 30 years, taking their cost-benefit ratios to be correct, and this ratio was the highest."

Voucher opponents caution that the students using vouchers are not the most dysfunctional … yet that is rarely a concern with training programs, Hoxby continued. Others worry that voucher participants might choose private schools for "the wrong reasons," but that issue is not considered important when evaluating training programs.

In fact, explained Hoxby, a training program that has any statistically significant positive effect is generally considered to be a "win."

Noting that a recent training program was considered a success even though it had produced a gain in only one county out of six, Hoxby suggested the government should not be setting different thresholds of success for public investments in programs with similar goals.

"If this had been charters or vouchers, I do not think that we would have had the same interpretation," she noted.

For more information…

WWW The complete text of Caroline Minter Hoxby's comments can be found on pages 82-88 of the transcript of the 2000 Cambridge School Choice Conference, available from The Manhattan Institute's Web site at **www.manhattan-institute.org/html/mics5.pdf**.

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"Research" Support for Teacher Certification Crumbles

State requirements for teacher licensing are "deeply misguided"

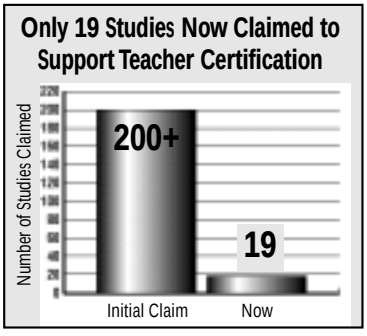
BY GEORGE A. CLOWES

Despite the assertion by teacher certification advocates that scores of research studies exist to prove certified teachers produce higher student achievement gains, a meticulously researched study from The Abell Foundation concludes that, in fact, there is no persuasive evidence for such an assertion. Moreover, according to the Foundation's work, current teacher licensing requirements are neither an efficient nor an effective means of ensuring a competent teaching force.

"This report should prompt every state board of education in the country to reconsider its teacher certification requirements," said Abell President Robert C. Embry, Jr.

"This body of research can generally be characterized by its astonishingly poor quality, failing to meet basic standards of scientific research."

KATE WALSH
THE ABELL FOUNDATION



New federal legislation in the No Child Left Behind Act mandates that within four years all teachers in U.S. public schools must be "highly qualified"—the assumption being that a certified teacher is a better teacher.

State teacher licensing requirements prescribe the completion of extensive coursework in the field of education and in the subject a prospective teacher intends to teach. Those policies are based on a claim by the education establishment that taking the coursework is the best way—in fact, the *only* way—to prepare teachers.

Re-examining the Evidence

Between 100 and 200 studies support that claim, according to prominent certification advocates. Kate Walsh, a senior policy analyst with the Baltimore, Maryland-based Abell Foundation, decided to review those studies and managed to locate 150 of them.

The results of her analysis are detailed in "Teacher Certification Reconsidered: Stumbling for Quality," published last October. Her conclusion: The academic research attempting to link teacher certification with student achievement is "astonishingly deficient."

Among the deficiencies cited by Walsh:

- selective citation of research;
- padding of analyses with multiple references;
- giving undue weight to unpublished dissertations and research that has not been peer-reviewed;
- routine violation of sound statistical analysis principles; and
- use of self-designed assessment measures.

"This body of research can generally be characterized by its astonishingly poor quality, failing to meet basic standards of scientific research," concluded Walsh. At the same time, "research that is of high quality is misinterpreted and misrepresented."

What that high-quality research indicates is that a teacher's verbal ability—not whether he or she took coursework in education pedagogy and learning styles—is the most important measurable attribute of an effective teacher.

"Not surprisingly, the importance of verbal ability aligns with similar findings that teachers who have attended selective colleges are more likely to raise student achievement," notes Walsh.

While private school principals "routinely seek out teachers who appear to be bright and use the selectivity of the teacher's college as a possible indicator of a teacher's aptitude," the certification process to gain access to a teaching job in a public school is "an inhospitable process," reports Walsh, deterring many capable individuals from entering public school teaching.

Recommendations for Change

The study recommends the following changes to the teacher certification process:

- Eliminate education coursework requirements and replace them with less complex and more flexible criteria.
- Implement various knowledge tests for teachers in different content areas.
- Report teacher verbal ability scores.
- Devolve responsibility for teacher qualification and selection to school districts and schools themselves.

School districts and principals would be responsible for developing comprehensive new teacher induction programs, reduced teaching loads for first-year teachers, and ongoing professional development closely associated with the curriculum.

"Such an overhaul represents a direct threat to schools of education and other education groups that benefit from the flawed certification process," acknowledges Walsh.

Response from Certification Advocates

Arthur E. Wise, president of the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education—who claimed in 1999 there were 100 studies supporting certification—simply ignored Walsh's findings. In December, he was continuing to claim, in a *USA Today* article, that "The weight of research on teacher qualifications demonstrates that fully qualified and licensed teachers raise student achievement more than do teachers who are not prepared and fully licensed."

Linda Darling-Hammond, executive director of the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future—who claimed in 1997 there were "more than two hundred studies" supporting the value of teacher certification—responded that the Abell report was a "stunning exercise in misrepresentation." In a 69-page response, she includes an analysis of 19 studies "that suggest that teacher expertise is important to student learning."

Rejoinder

According to Walsh, the 19 studies cited by Darling-Hammond—a dramatically smaller number than the "more than 200" she claimed earlier—have inferior design and methodologies. Even if those shortcomings are overlooked, Walsh notes, the studies contribute little to the debate—certainly not sufficient evidence to justify barring uncertified teachers from the classroom, which is current policy in all 50 states.

"The issue at hand here is not whether schools of education offer some helpful and valuable coursework," writes Walsh. "They undoubtedly do. The issue is whether individuals who have not taken any education coursework (valuable or not) are at such a disadvantage that they should not be allowed to begin teaching. The evidence that would justify such a restriction is simply not there."

For more information…

WWW The Abell Foundation report, "Teacher Certification Reconsidered: Stumbling for Quality," by Kate Walsh, is available from the Foundation's Web site at **www.abell.org/TeacherCertReconsidered.pdf**. An executive summary and appendix, summarizing more than 200 studies, also are available at the site at **www.abell.org/Executive Summary.pdf** and **www.ReviewofResearch.pdf**.

Linda Darling-Hammond's response to the Abell report, "The Research and Rhetoric on Teacher Certification: A Response to 'Teacher Certification Reconsidered,'" is available in news release and report forms from the Web site of the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future at **www.nctaf.org/publications/abell_release.htm** and **www.nctaf.org/publications/abell_report.pdf**.

The Abell Foundation rejoinder to Linda Darling-Hammond's response, "Teacher Certification Reconsidered: Stumbling for Quality—A Rejoinder," by Kate Walsh and Michael Podgursky, is available in news release and report forms from the Foundation's Web site at **www.abell.org/press_11_27.html** and **www.abell.org/LDHRejoinder.pdf**.

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Handicapping Choice

In many sports, handicapping rules are established with the intent of equalizing competition among players of differing abilities, or "leveling the playing field."

In golf, for example, each player has a number of handicap strokes that are subtracted from his or her actual score. In horseshoe pitching and bowling, a number of bonus points is added to each player's actual score. In handicap horse racing, extra weights are assigned to be carried by each horse.

In K-12 education, competition is effectively *hobbled* rather than handicapped, according to the sports usage of that term.

For example, a recent study on competition in K-12 education describes the following impediments faced by parents looking for alternatives to their local public school: "parents choosing a private school incur tuition fees; parents choosing a different public school may incur residential re-location costs, or costs of appealing to the school district for reassignment."

"In K-12 education, competition is effectively *hobbled* rather than handicapped, according to the sports usage of that term."

LINKED continued from page 1

Clive R. Belfield and Henry M. Levin, a professor of economics and education at Columbia University Teachers College and also the Center's director. Belfield is the Center's research director.

Belfield and Levin examined more than 35 research studies that tested the effects of competition—from other school districts and from private schools—on such educational outcomes as student test scores, graduation rates, educational expenditures, and teacher quality. No voucher studies were included in their analysis.

Two important educational outcomes were omitted from the review: changes in parental involvement, and measures of satisfaction with schooling. Parental involvement is seen by experts as the key to improving the nation's public schools, and a recent RAND study reported "substantially higher levels" of parental satisfaction in voucher schools compared to public schools. (See "RAND Study Grudgingly Reveals Good News About Choice," page 1.)

Beneficial Effects of Competition

A sizable majority of the studies reviewed by Belfield and Levin report beneficial effects of competition. The following relationships between competition and educational outcomes were identified:

- Academic test scores in public schools rise with increases in competition;
- Graduation rates increase with increased competition;
- Education spending is lower with increased competition;
- Educational efficiency is higher with increased competition;
- Teacher quality, as indicated by measures such as student-teacher ratios, is higher with increased competition;
- Teacher salaries are higher with increased competition;
- Housing prices are higher with increased competition;
- Adults' wages increase with increased competition.

"The above evidence shows reasonably consistent evidence of a link between competition (choice) and education quality," report Belfield and Levin, after reviewing all the studies. "Increased competition and higher educational quality are positively correlated," they conclude, noting this conclusion is "highly plausible" to an economist.

While many economists, including Belfield and Levin, believe market competition improves the efficiency of resource allocation, the scale and generality of those efficiency gains is less clear—or well-accepted—in the education arena. The study was undertaken to review the substantial body of research that has been done on competition in K-12 education and to answer the question: "How much and according to what measures of output does increased competition improve educational quality?"

Defining Markets, Measuring Competition

The review focuses on the link between educational outcomes and competitive pressures across large markets. One reason for looking at large-scale, cross-sectional evidence, explain the authors, is that "there is some concern over the external validity of small-scale voucher programs."

Belfield and Levin acknowledge that in these larger markets—where there are no vouchers or tuition tax credits—parental choice comes with very substantial disincentives: "[P]arents choosing a private school incur tuition fees; parents choosing a different public school may incur residential re-location costs, or costs of appealing to the school district for reassignment," note the authors.

"Competition" in the context of this study thus means parents have a *choice* of education suppliers, not that they have a *cost-free* choice among those suppliers.

One measure of competition is the share of school enrollments achieved by private schools. Another measure is the Herfindahl Index, which typically refers to public school choices, either within the district or across districts.

Bounded between full competition at 0 and monopoly at 1.0, the Herfindahl Index is calculated as the sum of squares of per-unit enrollments over total enrollments. In the education markets reviewed, the Herfindahl Index values range from 0.11 to 0.87, with an approximate average of 0.35.

"Broadly, these index values indicate education is highly concentrated compared to other sectors," report Belfield and Levin. For example, the Federal Trade Commission defines industrial markets with Herfindahl Index values below 0.1 as unconcentrated; between 0.1 and 0.18 as moderately concentrated; and above 0.18 as concentrated.

Policy Implications

What are the policy implications of the study's major finding: "Educational outcomes are higher in more competitive markets"?

The results suggest increasing the competition for students among public and private schools may improve educational effectiveness, efficiency, and other desired outcomes.

For such a policy to be practical and desirable, Belfield and Levin argue that, first, the aggregate benefits must be large; and second, those benefits "must be set against any increases in costs that are required to boost competition in education." Their study did not address, however, the possibility of cost decreases from increasing competition.

The benefits of competition were estimated by examining how much the benefits changed when the measure of competition in the studies was increased by one standard deviation. Test scores of public school students, for example, would increase by approximately one-tenth of a standard deviation when the competition measure was increased by one standard deviation. The authors note that privately funded voucher programs and the Tennessee class size experiment found effects approximately twice as large.

Belfield and Levin caution that reforms to effect a one standard deviation increase in competition may not be feasible in the large markets they studied, where choice is effectively penalized. They point out, for example, that increasing the number of school districts would require "substantial structural reform." Even if effected, such a reform would still penalize competition, requiring parents to move to a new place of residence in order to change schools.

"The results suggest increasing the competition for students among public and private schools may improve educational effectiveness, efficiency, and other desired outcomes."

For more information…

WWW The full text of *Occasional Paper* No. 35, the 54-page report by Clive Belfield and Henry Levin issued September 2001, is available in Adobe Acrobat's PDF format from the Web site of the National Center for the Study of Privatization in Education. Point your Web browser to **http://www.ncspe.org/keepout/papers/00035/585_OP35.pdf**.
An abstract of the paper is available at **http://www.ncspe.org/ocpap/op_pa_detail.php?pap_id=00035**.

The authors also point out the proportion of students in private schools in the U.S. has remained reasonably static—ranging only from 9.04 to 12.13 percent—from the late 1940s to the early 1980s. The tiny year-to-year increase suggests the percentage of students in private schools is likely to increase only very slowly in the present competitive environment.

Belfield and Levin contend private school enrollments would increase very slowly even if vouchers or tuition tax credits were introduced into the K-12 education market. That claim is not supported by their analysis, however, as no voucher studies were included among those they reviewed.

Unlike the competitive reforms studied in the reports Belfield and Levin analyzed, vouchers and tax credits change the nature of the competitive environment by removing the substantial cost penalty parents presently incur for exercising school choice. Thus, a more appropriate basis for predicting changes in private school enrollment in a competitive environment including vouchers and tax credits would be data for Milwaukee, Wisconsin during the 1980-2001 period.

School Reform News

Let us know what you think!

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C-

George A. Clowes
The Heartland Institute
19 South LaSalle, Suite 903
Chicago, IL 60603
clowes@heartland.org

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Does Improved Student Achievement Require Increased Resources?

Past increases have not produced student performance gains

BY HANNA SKANDERA AND RICHARD SOUSA

Public school administrators are increasingly being quoted as saying that improved achievement requires more resources. Cost per pupil, they maintain, is an excellent gauge for analyzing education investment and estimating return.

However, since previous increases in per-pupil expenditures have not been matched by increased student performance, a strategy of increasing resources may not produce the desired outcome.

Spending per student has increased markedly over time. According to the U.S. Department of Education, expenditures per pupil for the 1919-20 school year were $354, in constant 1999-2000 dollars. By 1960, real expenditures had more than quintupled. In the 1999-2000 school year, per-pupil expenditures were approximately $6,584—nearly 20 times as high as in 1919-20.

Where Did the Money Go?

Where have the resources gone? What results did they achieve?

Special education is often cited as a primary contributor to increased per-pupil costs. Special education programs have grown rapidly, and per-pupil expenditures for special education are more than twice those for regular education programs.

But even with its rapid growth and high cost, special education does not account for the bulk of school spending. The three principal causes of increased spending are:

- falling pupil-teacher ratios (i.e., more teachers);
- rising teacher salaries; and
- increasing non-instructional expenditures.

For example, during the quarter-century between 1970 and 1995, per-pupil expenditures increased by more than three-fourths. During that period, the pupil-teacher ratio fell by one-quarter, the percentage of teachers with advanced degrees doubled, and the median number of years of a teacher's experience nearly doubled (see Table 1). With more teachers in the system, and with teacher pay linked to increases in credentials and experience, higher per-pupil spending resulted.

What Did the Money Buy?

Having more teachers per student, and more teachers with advanced degrees and more experience, might be expected to lead to better educational outcomes. The evidence, however, does not support that conclusion.

During the same quarter-century that these educational resources were being increased, student achievement remained flat (see Table 2).

A Complex Relationship

The contradiction of increased resources and flat achievement suggests resource shortages may not be the sole culprit for low levels of student performance. This is not to say resources do not matter, but that there is no simple cause-and-effect relationship between the two.

Recent studies reinforce a disconnect between spending and achievement. For example, the American Legislative Exchange Council's (ALEC) "Report Card on American Education, a State-by-State Analysis 1976-2000," concluded

> it is clear after studying the data and results that the policies of the past have failed to meet the educational needs of our country's children. If we continue to spend more money on the existing educational system in an attempt to buy our way to better student achievement, we will condemn another generation of students to mediocrity.

The ALEC study showed no correlation between conventional measures of educational inputs, such as expenditures per pupil and teacher salaries, and educational outputs, such as scores on standardized tests. Increased funding simply does not translate into improved achievement.

For example, in the 1998-99 school year, Utah spent $3,807 per pupil, while Maryland spent $7,059. There is little evidence to suggest that equalizing resources between the two states would equalize achievement. In the 1998 National Assessment of Educational Progress, 31 percent of Utah's eighth-graders scored at proficient or better in reading; despite the large discrepancy in per-pupil expenditures, Maryland had the same percentage of eighth-graders who scored at or above proficient, 31 percent.

Also, based on several standardized tests, the ALEC report rated Iowa (ranked 32nd in per-pupil expenditures) as having the top-performing public elementary and secondary schools in the nation, followed by Minnesota (ranked 14th in spending), and Wisconsin (ranked 9th). At the bottom of the achievement ratings were Mississippi (ranked 50th in per-pupil expenditures), Washington, DC (ranked 5th), and Louisiana (ranked 39th).

"The evidence gives us no reason to believe that increased resources alone are the solution to poor student achievement. Incentives may be their necessary partner."

Expenditures per student have increased over time, and those increasing resources have been spent on a wide range of touted reforms: increasing the level of teacher education, increasing teacher experience, and reducing student-teacher ratios. The last three decades, however, do not reflect the desired outcomes: Student achievement has remained flat. Nationwide per-pupil expenditures are expected to increase even further over the next several years, from approximately $6,600 in 1997 to $7,600 in 2007, an increase of 15 percent.

Better Spending, Not More

If increased resources are not at the heart of improved student achievement, what is?

One possible answer is that resources need to be allocated differently rather than simply increased.

For example, the present teacher pay system provides no way to distinguish between a good teacher and a bad teacher. Both can expect the same salary and promotion pattern, regardless of whether the performance of their students is mediocre or outstanding.

The evidence gives us no reason to believe that increased resources alone are the solution to poor student achievement. Incentives may be their necessary partner.

Hanna Skandera is a public affairs fellow at The Hoover Institution. Her email address is skandera@hoover.stanford.edu. Richard Sousa is an associate director at The Hoover Institution. His email address is sousa@hoover.stanford.edu. *©2002 Hanna Skandera and Richard Sousa. Reprint requests should be directed to the copyright holders.*

TABLE 1
RESOURCES IN U.S. PUBLIC SCHOOLS, 1970 VERSUS 1995

	Real expenditure per pupil (in 1997 $)	Pupil-teacher ratio	Teachers with at least a master's degree	Median teacher experience
1970	$3,645	22.3	27.5%	8 years
1995	$6,434	17.3	56.2%	15 years

Source: Eric Hanushek, "Spending on Schools," in A Primer on American Schools, Terry M. Moe, editor (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2001).

TABLE 2
ACHIEVEMENT IN U.S. PUBLIC SCHOOLS, 1970s VERSUS 1996

	Average NAEP reading score, 17-year-olds (1971)	Average NAEP math score, 17-year-olds (1973)	Average NAEP science score, 17-year-olds (1970)
1970s	285.2	304.0	305.0
1996	286.9	307.0	296.0

Source: U.S. Department of Education. National Center for Education Statistics. Digest of Education Statistics, 1999, NCES 2000-031.

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School Choice as Family Policy

AN INTERVIEW WITH JOHN E. COONS
BY GEORGE A. CLOWES

The influential body of work of University of California, Berkeley Law Professor Emeritus John E. "Jack" Coons on the constitutionality of school finance systems has been motivated by a vision of simple justice that Coons has consistently put above all other considerations.

That same vision of justice makes Coons impatient with fellow Democrats who affect a deep concern for the poor while opposing efforts to empower them.

"So far as I can tell," he said recently, "the Democrats are either running these state schools that warehouse the poor or—with the help of the teachers unions—are busy in the legislatures and Congress making sure that nothing in this system changes."

Coons was a professor of law at Berkeley from 1967 until his retirement in 1994. He maintains a busy office at the school. In 1999, he was awarded an honorary Doctor of Law degree by his alma mater, the University of Minnesota, Duluth, for his acknowledged eminence in the field of education and the law.

After receiving his B.A. in history from UMD, Coons received his J.D. from Northwestern Law School, where he subsequently taught for 12 years. He has been a visiting professor at the University of Tokyo and Arizona State University College of Law.

Coons is the author of eight books and numerous published articles and special reports. His latest book, with Patrick M. Brennan, is By Nature Equal: the Anatomy of a Western Insight (1999). Coons recently spoke with School Reform News Managing Editor George Clowes.

CLOWES: What first drew you into the school choice arena?

COONS: It was in 1961, when I was a law professor at Northwestern University. I knew nothing about schools then, but I signed a contract with the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights to examine whether the Chicago Public School District was complying with the desegregation mandate of *Brown v. Board of Education* and the older, parallel principle of separate but equal from *Plessy v. Ferguson*.

In looking at desegregation, discrimination, and access to schools and resources, I got a good handle on how schools were financed. As a result, I became interested in the structures of school finance, and whether they were constitutional. In fact, at the end of the chapter I wrote for the Commission, I wrote: "This is an interesting constitutional problem."

In 1963, I was joined by two Northwestern law school students, Stephen Sugarman and William Clune. We began to think about how the Fourteenth Amendment might apply to school finance in a manner that would solve the problem of inter-district capacity to raise money but would not limit the state in allowing differences in spending between districts according to any criterion that they wanted—including the willingness of people to invest in education with their own personal funds, but excluding the accident of the taxable wealth of their district.

In the course of that work, we developed what is known as the Serrano principle, which we argued explicitly before the California Supreme Court. It included the opportunity for vouchers. In fact, we were accused by the other side of supporting vouchers, and I said, "You're absolutely right."

We won those cases on the principle that the legislature would not be in any way impeded in using any decentralized system, including the family, as the school district, so long as it did not make the amount of public money for a child's education a function of the wealth of the child's family or the school district. To do that would be an irrational and unfair standard for a public agency, in our view. We published a book in 1970 called *Private Wealth and Public Education*, which expressed this constitutional theory. We analyzed 14 or 15 state school systems and described how they could be reoriented without either wrecking or decreasing local control.

CLOWES: So each family is a school district, the ultimate in local control?

COONS: It could be. This was not a mandate to do it in one single way. For example, one way is to have the state take over everything, as Hawaii did, and have only one school district. You could go from that extreme—which we didn't personally favor—to the other extreme, which would be vouchers.

CLOWES: How would you describe the present public school system?

COONS: In the governmental system that we operate under, people with resources can buy a nice house in the district where they want their child to go to school, or they can send their child to a private school. But working-class and low-income families do not have those options because, generally speaking, choice is a direct linear function of a family's capacity to pay. In fact, we have a system of choice, but only for upper-income families. The rule is: The rich get choice and the poor get conscripted.

Now, if the poor were all invincibly stupid, or had bad intentions toward their children, then we should not allow them to have the same authority that middle-class parents exercise over the education of their children. But I haven't heard that as a justification for the system.

Not only that, but the system seems to assume that a unified curriculum is necessary for these disadvantaged children to get the right ideas, and that there is one methodology, one pedagogy, to transmit this one content to them.

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The paradox is that there is no uniformity. With regard to pedagogy, there are a dozen different competing methods trumpeted by professionals in the public sector. So, depending upon which district or school you're in, you may be using one kind of book or another, or one style of teaching or another. The approved methodology varies greatly from place to place.

With regard to content, there's a basic core that people agree on: The three Rs, science, and not breaking the law. That's about it. If you go beyond that and look at other issues, you find that there is no consensus at all.

"What must it be like for people who have raised their children until they're five years old, and suddenly, in this most important decision about their education, they have no say at all?"

Our society does not agree on the answers to questions such as abortion, evolution, sex education, women's rights, and environmental issues. You can reel off another 25 issues on which there is no one American view. So, whatever you teach is not a public but a private view, chosen by some person who happens to be given authority within a state school system.

What you have then, is a smorgasbord of content and pedagogy among public schools. For the middle class, this means that they have a market in schooling. It's not a good one, but they can shop around, and if it gets too bad in the public sector, they can get out.

But for the disadvantaged family, it means their child just gets sent some place, and whoever happens to be at the other end will decide whether their child gets, for example, condoms or chastity. I'm not taking a side on that question, only illustrating that, if you're poor, you just take potluck on content and methodology. That strikes me as a rather difficult enterprise to justify on rational grounds.

CLOWES: The justification I often hear is that public schools are the only places where all children come together to learn about democracy and civic values.

COONS: That can't be true, except for the poor and working class, because the rest have their choice of schools and cluster where they please. For the poor, it's conscription, a military-type democracy where you get conscripted to some unit. But in any case, it's impossible to imagine the teaching of democratic values if you can't agree on what they are.

For example, if you're in a public school, teaching about civic values and obeying the law, how do you respond when the question arises: "Where do these rules come from? What is the source of authority?" It's very hard to answer because there is no consensus on the answer.

A lot of us would simply say it's a religious source. But some people say, "The authority is from nature; we're made a certain way." Still others say, "It's from the social contract." Then students ask, "How did I get into this contract? And how do I get out of it?" And the answer may come back that, "There really is no basis, but it's better not to kill each other." Then another student asks, "Why not, if you can get away with it?"

There are many different ways to answer the question of authority, but there is no public answer.

CLOWES: And you can't say that the authority comes from the parents because the school system has overridden their authority.

COONS: That is exactly right. You've got schools that profess very different ideas about why we should be responsible, if at all. So, it seems to me, in that respect, we do not have public schools at all. Instead, we have a system of schools created by the state in which very important values are taught in a very unsystematic and unpublic way. Teachers have very different opinions about the fundamental sources of value.

For example, what if a teacher is asked, "Should we cut down redwoods and make houses out of them?" A teacher up in Eureka might say, "Yes, of course." Down here in Hollywood or Berkeley, they might say, "No, you should never cut a redwood." Others would say, "Gosh, I don't know. What do you think?" There are seven or eight different answers to this question, but none of them is a public answer.

Similarly with sex education. In the Bay area, different school districts have adopted very different programs. Some emphasize chastity or abstinence, and others emphasize safe sex with abortion as a last resort. If you're stuck with a school that dishes out condoms and you happen to be a Muslim fundamentalist with a daughter that's in the school, you wouldn't be too happy.

CLOWES: A child could come home with a report card filled with As and the parents might still be very unhappy with the school?

COONS: Oh, absolutely. If your child is getting As in safe sex, you could be very unhappy about the school, particularly if you can't afford to go any place else.

CLOWES: So if you are going to enhance school choice, it should first be for the poor.

COONS: Absolutely. There are a lot of benign effects of school choice but, for me, choice is family policy. It is one of the most important things we could possibly do as therapy for the institution of the family, for which we have no substitute.

The relationship between the parent and child is very damaged if the parent loses all authority over the child for six hours a day, five days a week, and over the content that is put into the child's mind.

What must it be like for people who have raised their children until they're five years old, and suddenly, in this most important decision about their education, they have no say at all? They're stripped of their sovereignty over their child.

And what must it be like for the child who finds that his parents don't have any power to help him out if he doesn't like the school? We are always complaining about the lack of responsibility in low-income families. But, the truth is, we have taken the authority away from them in this most important aspect of their child's life. And then we rail at them for being rotten parents.

It's a shame that there are no social science studies on the effect of choicelessness on the family. If you are stripped of power—kept out of the decision-making loop—you are likely to experience degeneration of your own capacity to be effective, because you have nothing to do. If you don't have any responsibilities, you get flabby. And what we have are flabby families at the bottom end of the income scale.

CLOWES: What about the effect of choice on the health of private schools, where there are concerns about increased regulation?

COONS: As you know, I do not quail at regulating voucher schools—but they should be regulated as lightly as possible. There have to be some baseline rules: You can't teach racial or religious hatred, gender inferiority, or anything like that. But beyond that, the private school's identity must be preserved. You have to let the religious ones be religious, establish their own size limits, select their own curriculum, and even have a compulsory curriculum if they want to, where students have to learn the school's religious material even if they don't believe it.

I'm not sure exactly where you would draw the line here, but you could say to a student, for example, "You have to take this religious course, and you have to pass it, but you don't have to believe it. You don't have to make an affirmation of faith in our belief, but you have to understand what it is and why we believe it."

In fact, I think that the choice programs in Milwaukee and Cleveland have gone too far in allowing students to opt out of religion classes. That is going too far toward stripping the school of its identity.

CLOWES: So even though the parent spends public funds at a private school, that school should still be able to say, "This is the way we do things here."

"In the governmental [education] system that we operate under ...The rule is: The rich get choice and the poor get conscripted."

COONS: Right. The school would say, "You're free to come here. We won't exclude you by charging you extra tuition that you can't afford." As far as I'm concerned, the school can only charge extra if it wants to apply a means test, so that the rich parent pays more than the poor parent. The school shouldn't be permitted to charge an additional fee over the voucher and say, for example, "Bring your voucher and $10,000." That wouldn't help the poor at all.

CLOWES: One alternative you've suggested, which would permit additional charges to certain students without a means test, would be for the school to say, "We will make 15 to 20 percent of the seats at our school available to low-income students who will bring whatever voucher they've got, and then those students can enroll at no extra charge."

COONS: That would be fine, and some for-profit schools might choose that option. You and I would knock around the details for five hours before we would settle on a program, but we agree in principle. In fact, I wouldn't stop schools from charging poor people. I would just say, "You can't charge them very much." I think it's good for people to pay. But the voucher has to be big enough in the first place, otherwise it's not going to start any new schools.

One of the fallback positions of the unions and others is to say that choice is going to breed schools that are really destructive. I would think that quite the opposite is the case.

If you treat the poor as if they were a bunch of nincompoops, giving them no responsibility, then they will react to this unfair treatment by having no allegiance to this society. If you want loyalty and a sense of respect for other people's beliefs, then encourage people to exercise their own beliefs—within the limits of the law—and we'll have a lot more "unum" out of our "pluribus." What we're getting out of the present public schools system is "E pluribus pluribus."

Finally, for people like me, who still have this romantic notion of achieving racial integration some day, this is the place to start. You can do it with school choice.

THE PRINCIPLE OF SUBSIDIARITY

"My country . . . has sometimes flouted but never abandoned the presumption that authority is best located in the individual or in the institutions nearest him. Its exercise at that level tends to discharge most effectively all but a few of the legitimate purposes, public and private, that a community can hold. And so we struggle still to keep power from collecting unnecessarily in large units—except, strangely, in the world of schools, where a smothering government monopoly persists to this day."

JOHN E. COONS (1997)

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More Schools Considering Uniforms for Students

Administrators believe they help improve student behavior

BY MIKE SCOTT

More public schools than ever before are turning to a regulated uniform code to improve behavior in and around schools.

In Michigan, many school administrators believe they can improve the security of their students by limiting the wearing of expensive brand-name clothing that in the past has resulted in attacks on students motivated by theft.

Easy at the Elementary Level

The Pontiac School District, located approximately 20 miles north of Detroit, is an urban district that includes over 20 elementary, middle, and high schools. Like many urban school districts, Pontiac has turned to a uniform code for some of its schools to promote more positive student interaction.

Three years ago, some of the elementary school principals proposed a uniform code as a way to improve student discipline. It worked at the elementary school level, as eight of the district's elementary schools utilize the code, which allows only white or blue tops and blue pants or skirts.

"The only complaints I have heard is that some kids want to wear what they want to wear," said Executive Director of Student Services Dr. Robert Taylor. "Many of the parents like it because it limits the uniforms their students can have, which makes the cost [of dressing their child] much more reasonable. They don't have to buy them a $100 outfit for school."

Taylor regards the uniform restrictions as a success at the elementary level, although no formal studies have been conducted. Principals and teachers think students are performing and behaving better in class, and Taylor believes students are "more in the mode of learning," which improves their behavior and their attention. He sees student safety as one of the benefits even though it was not a major reason for implementing the uniform code.

Difficult to Impose

When the same dress code was attempted for one semester at two district middle schools, however, the student body wouldn't follow it as a rule, said Taylor.

"At that age, kids really want to stand out and one way they do that is by their dress," said Taylor, who added the district leaves the decision on uniforms up to individual school principals. But, he noted, "We may see some of our middle schools phasing in a dress code down the line once some of the elementary students we now have move on to the next level."

The nearby Inkster school district, which includes local utility Detroit Edison as a corporate partner, has run a voluntary uniform program for its elementary and middle school students since 1997. Superintendent Terry Boguth said there were some student safety issues that contributed to the implementation of the policy.

"I think we developed it to make everyone feel equal so every student feels the same when possible," she said. "I think it does help with school safety because you don't have as many students wearing [expensive] name brands."

Boguth said the voluntary policy has not extended to the district's high school. She estimates students in the elementary and middle schools participate in the uniform policy 60 percent of the time. As a public school district, Boguth admits it would be difficult to establish a mandatory policy, noting they could lose some students to charter schools if they pushed hard to achieve 100 percent participation.

"Particularly with high school students, there are safety concerns," she admitted, "but it is also harder to get them to wear uniforms."

The Inkster High School Student Council this year discussed a possible voluntary uniform code. Some students expressed their desire for uniforms so that brand-name clothing does not determine a status hierarchy. Getting such student buy-in to a uniform policy is important, said Boguth.

Getting Support

Taylor said for each individual school to participate in a dress code, 67 percent of parents must be in favor of the uniform code. Vivian Terry, principal of Rogers Elementary in Pontiac, spent her entire summer four years ago selling parents on the idea of school uniforms because she felt the practice would improve safety and student behavior.

"We did everything that summer to get 67 percent, everything from letters, to phone calls, to going door-to-door, to signing up parents in the parking lot," said Terry. "The district allowed us to use uniforms if the parents supported it, even though it wasn't in favor of uniforms."

Terry and her staff provided literature on local stores that offered white or powder blue tops and navy blue pants, and the school bought clothes from several thrift stores for families with limited incomes.

Terry's biggest concern about safety was that students in some school districts around the country had been harmed when other students had tried to steal name-brand clothing from them.

"That didn't happen here, but I feel that uniforms are just a good thing," said Terry. "We tell our students they are sophisticated, intelligent, and dignified and children who don't [adhere] to the uniforms send mixed signals to others."

Fortunately, nearly 100 percent of Terry's students this year have followed the dress code. She provides occasional treats and awards to students who do follow the code, and parents have remained positive about the policy, although some have expressed their concern.

"A few parents have said that wearing a uniform takes away a child's individualism," said Terry. "It's just a process of working with the students and parents to show them all the benefits."

"Convinced" Behavior Is Better

As uniforms relate to security, Pontiac cites no specific studies indicating a significant improvement. But Taylor said elementary school principals are "convinced" student behavior is better when uniforms are in place. He would recommend the policy to other districts across the country.

"I think it's important to receive parental input, but we think it has worked at our schools," he said. "It can't hurt, and if student [tests results and grades] improve, you would think behavior would improve as well."

Mike Scott is a freelance writer based in the Detroit (Michigan) metropolitan area. His email address is Mascott17@aol.com.

Parents have mixed views of school uniforms

BY MIKE SCOTT

Many of the parents in suburban Detroit interviewed by *School Reform News* indicated their support for public school uniforms. They also acknowledged they had no evidence their children would be safer because of uniforms.

W. Henry Cobb of Lathrup Village, Michigan is one parent in favor of uniforms. Cobb, whose children attended the Lathrup School District, said students should not be allowed to wear baggy pants and other pieces of clothing that could be considered "gang wear."

"I don't understand how children can learn anything dressing the way they do," said Cobb. "They are more focused on the types of shoes they have and not their studies. I know this [uniforms] will tilt the learning curve upward."

Michelle Gibson of Inkster is in favor of the navy-and-white outfits her child must wear to Meek-Milton Elementary School. The uniform code was instituted in Inkster in 1998.

"They're convenient. And they bring a good atmosphere to the school," said Gibson.

But Carole Bell, a former teacher and parent of students in the St. Clair Shores school district, feels that blaming the lack of school success on what students wear does not address the real concern. She wrote a letter to *The Detroit Free Press* recently, stressing the need for schools to teach the basics of reading, writing, and math, rather than worrying about uniforms.

"Schools can't cover everything," Bell wrote. "Rather than worrying about what kids wear, schools should concentrate on developing learning skills and call on parents to take responsibility for social behaviors."

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Charter School Facilities & Finance

The two biggest problems in charter school development have been identified as facilities and finance. With this column, School Reform News aims to bring its readers the newest ideas on solving these problems.

Satellite Schools and Public-Private Partnerships

BY MARK HOWARD

Charter school operators cite lack of start-up funds, inadequate operating funds, and inadequate facilities as the three largest barriers they face in developing and implementing their charters, according to Richard Seder of the Reason Public Policy Institute in a study of public-private partnerships.

One option for addressing the charter school facilities issue is through public-private partnerships. Two example of such partnerships are satellite schools and workplace charter schools.

Satellite schools, also known as work-site partnership schools, are public schools located on the business property of a private-sector firm. They are primarily designed to serve the children of the firm's employees. Typically, the public school system contributes teachers, books, and curriculum, while the sponsoring firm provides and maintains the physical space for classrooms.

These satellite schools frequently offer before-school and after-school programs so there is complete day care for the children at the school, matching up the care of the children with the work schedule of the parents.

One of the first public-private partnerships to create a school in the workplace was developed in Dade County, Florida, under an agreement between American Bankers Insurance Group and the Dade County School Board. The private partner, American Bankers, spent $2.4 million to construct the school buildings.

The first workplace charter school was developed in Miami, Florida by Ryder System, Inc., the world's largest truck leasing and rental company, as well as one of the largest operators and managers of school bus systems in the United States. The Ryder Elementary Charter School opened in September 1999 and now serves approximately 500 K-5 students in a 30,000 square foot facility adjacent to the Ryder System headquarters.

Ryder invested $3.75 million to create the school as a benefit for its employees, whose children are given preference in enrolling at the school. Selective enrollment is permitted under Florida's charter school law, although it is not in most other charter school states. The success of the Ryder school prompted two other Florida businesses to open workplace charter schools: the Villages Charter Elementary School in Lakewood County and the J.F.K. Medical Charter School in Palm Beach.

Nationwide, private-sector firms have formed over 30 public-private partnerships whose aim is to provide school facilities at the workplace to serve the children of their employees. These investments provide benefits for all involved:

- Firms that sponsor workplace schools report reduced absenteeism, lower turnover rates, and increased productivity among their employees.
- School district partners access additional capacity at no cost.
- Children and working parents see each other more.

Florida is a pioneer in the development of satellite schools and in stimulating partnerships between businesses and charter schools. A key element of Florida's success in creating workplace charter schools is the provision in the charter school law that permits selective enrollment. Other states can benefit from the Sunshine State's experience.

Mark Howard has specialized in the development of commercial properties since 1980. He owns and operates M.H. Realty Associates, Inc. in Tamarac, Florida. Readers with questions on facilities and finances are encouraged to contact him directly at mgfl@aol.com. The most frequent questions about common problems will be included in future columns.

Indianapolis Awards First Charters

GEO Foundation becomes first policy organization to run charter school

BY GEORGE A. CLOWES

After taking two months to review the 21 applications received last October, Indianapolis Mayor Bart Peterson in early December gave the go-ahead to two community organizations and two corporations to create the city's first four charter schools.

The two community organizations selected are notable in that both have been frequent critics of the existing public school system. As the editors of *The Indianapolis Star* pointed out, they "are risking their own futures by undertaking charters."

"If they succeed, they'll have cemented their credibility when discussing education reform," stated a recent *Star* editorial. "But if they fail, few within or out of the educational system will listen to them."

Focus on Technology

Christel House Academy, which will offer technology-based education to just 72 elementary school students, will be operated collaboratively by philanthropist Christel DeHaan and Sabis Educational Systems. DeHaan launched the education reform group Project E in May 2000 to serve as a catalyst for the improvement of K-12 education in Indiana.

The Greater Educational Opportunities Foundation, a strong proponent of school choice, will operate the 21st Century Community School in an historic downtown building currently occupied by the Indiana Business College. GEO is the first public policy advocacy organization in the country to apply for and receive a charter.

Like the one-room schoolhouse of the nineteenth century, the foundation's charter school will bring together multiple age groups, but it will enhance individual student learning by making use of the information technologies of the twenty-first century. Each student will have a laptop computer, and the first task of each day will be to check email.

"The Greater Educational Opportunities Foundation . . . is the first public policy advocacy organization in the country to apply for and receive a charter."

"The fundamental goal will not be that students learn how to use technology, but that students learn, using technology," stressed GEO Foundation President Kevin Teasley. "Equipping the factory school of yesterday with the technology of tomorrow has been generally unsuccessful in producing students prepared for tomorrow," he added. "We need a new model for the twenty-first century."

The downtown location was chosen to make the school more readily accessible to all students in the city, and the school's transportation plan includes using community centers as common pick-up and drop-off areas. The proximity of the school to downtown also provides unlimited career exploration opportunities with mentors, apprenticeships, and partnerships with business, the arts, government, and local universities.

Indianapolis Mayor Bart Peterson congratulates one of the first student winners of his Excellence in Education award. The reform-friendly Peterson approved in early December the city's first four charter schools. *file photo/Peterson Web site*

"Our charter school is the first and only charter approved in Indiana that is not using an education management organization and is not a converted private school," noted Teasley. "We will be locally controlled and managed."

To get the school started and funded through its first semester, board members of the 21st Century Community School are providing significant start-up capital, and the GEO Foundation also has raised significant funding for initial operations from other local foundations. The charter school board has hired veteran Indiana educator and entrepreneur John Hayden to run the school. Hayden worked as a successful public school teacher and principal for 21 years before embracing the private sector to start a small private school.

Organizations representing Indiana's public school superintendents have been less than enthusiastic about the creation of charter schools. Two superintendents have threatened to ban the hiring of student teachers from Ball State University if the college grants any charters. In addition, an organization representing 32 of the largest school districts in the state has called for a moratorium on charter school approvals because the districts don't want to lose state funding for students who transfer to charter schools.

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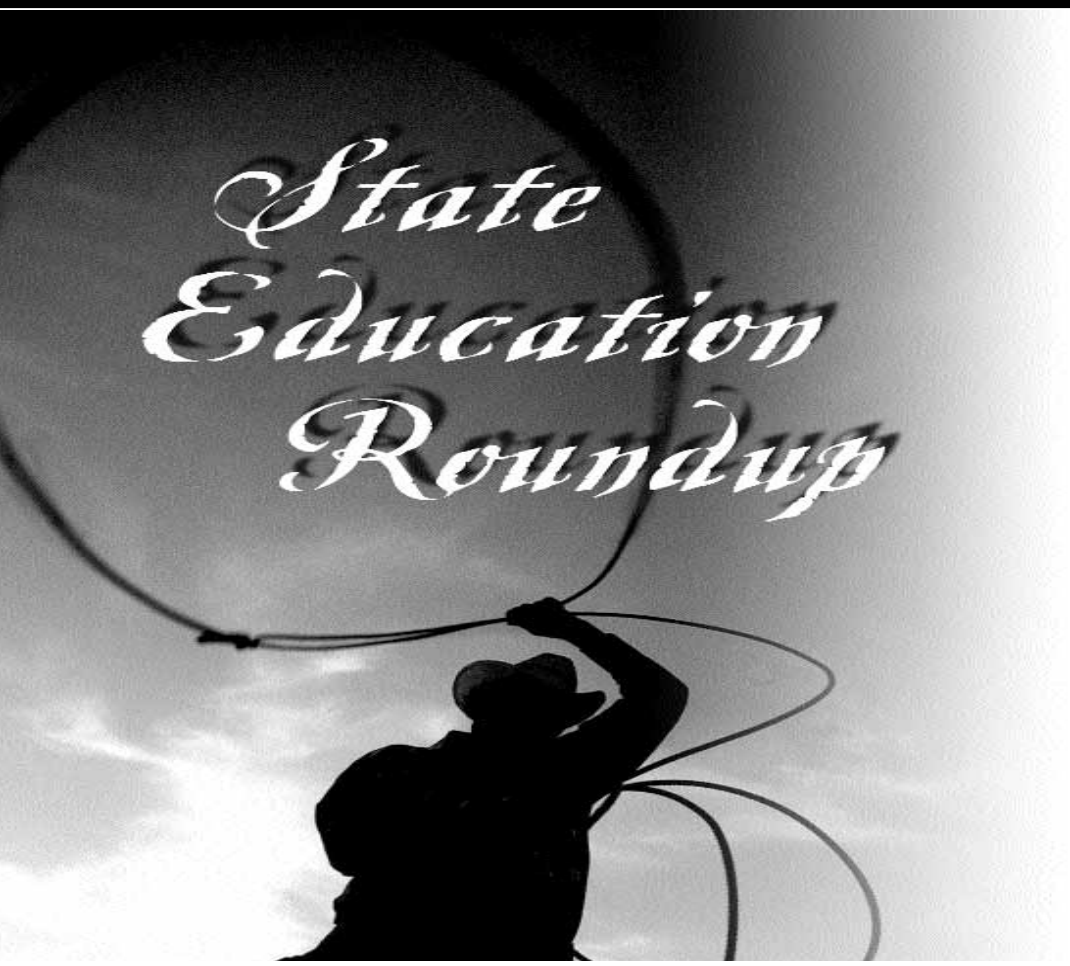

California

District Thwarts Breakup, Faces Mismanagement Probe

Having bulldozed an attempt by residents of Carson to form their own school district, the Los Angeles Unified School District repeated its success against residents of the San Fernando Valley.

In early December, the California Board of Education unanimously rejected a plan to place a San Fernando secession proposal before the voters on the grounds that it would exacerbate overcrowding in LAUSD schools and reduce their tax base. The district is larger than 16 state governments, with 70,000 employees and a $9 billion budget.

Appearing before the board, LAUSD Superintendent Roy Romer said he'd be "willing to come back eight to 10 years from now [to discuss breakup]," but for now, the district was "on the march."

Romer will soon have to march into the office of State Controller Kathleen Connell, who promises to launch an investigation into the mismanagement of school construction bond money in the district.

"The district estimates it's $600 million short and more than two years behind in fixing the schools. In fact, only half the projects are completed, and most of the money is gone, including 20 percent of the funds earmarked for building badly needed new schools. This is a scandal of enormous proportions," editorialized *The Daily News* of Los Angeles. A March 2000 audit found that $51 million of bond money had been wasted on management fees.

"What the school board did here is give the district another 10 years," said Paula Boland, one of the leaders of the San Fernando secession movement. "They gave up another generation of kids to the pit bulls."

Education Intelligence Agency Communiqué
December 12, 2001

District of Columbia

20 Years Ago, DC Voters Rejected School Choice

In 1981, the American Federation of Teachers and National Education Association spent nearly $100,000 to persuade voters in the District of Columbia to defeat a ballot initiative by a margin of nine to one. The measure would have provided tax credits of up to $1,200 for educational expenses families incurred for private school tuition or tutoring services.

Proponents of the measure argued the tax credits would help all students in the District by attracting entrepreneurs who would compete for the parents' business, providing services superior to those provided by the public schools. However, since the measure failed, the District's unchallenged public schools have remained "about as motivated as a jockey in a one-horse race," according to Cato Institute education researcher Dan Lips.

Today, DC students rank near the bottom on any measure of student achievement when compared to students in the 50 states. Real per-pupil spending is up by nearly 50 percent since 1981, but only one in four students has mastered basic math, and fewer than half can read. Here's how school board President Peggy Cooper Cafritz described the situation:

"The absence of student achievement in the school system just boggled [my] mind," she said, adding that half of the District's public school teachers were "incompetent."

Dan Lips, "Marion Barry's Lost Generation"
Cato Institute
December 11, 2001

Florida

State Will Grade Charters

Charter schools in Florida are embracing new accountability measures that will require schools in operation for at least one year and serving 30 or more students to be graded based on their FCAT scores (Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test).

The move is a result of the path-breaking A+ Plan, which since 1999 has been grading schools based on state test scores and allowing children in persistently failing schools to go to a school of their choice. Charter operators welcomed the move.

Said one: "If I walk into a legislator's office, drop on the desk a list of charter schools and how they are performing compared to other schools, the legislator will be more receptive than if I say, 'Trust me.'"

In 2000, the Pembroke Pines elementary and middle charter schools were rewarded for their "A" performance with bonuses of nearly $100,000. They were two of seven charter schools in the state to receive money for high achievement. Not only will charters now have to test, but the public will be able to make meaningful judgements about their performance as well.

Center for Education Reform Newswire
December 11, 2001

Missouri

MO Irony

Missouri's State Commissioner of Education, D. Kent King, is asking for legislation to give him the power to withhold funding from charter schools that have yet to fulfill their academic promise.

Thus far, the two-year old Missouri charter schools are attracting the state's most at-risk students and have had little opportunity to take state tests.

King did not include in his request legislation to withhold funds from conventional public schools that have proven to fail students over the past several decades.

The Illinois Charter School Facs
November 20, 2001

More MO Irony

The University of Missouri-Kansas City, sponsor of the Academy of Kansas City Charter School, has announced it has placed the Academy on probation, its principal concern being the charter school board has ceded too much power to its management company.

"The school's governance structure does not meet state law because it places decision-making in the hands of an out-of-state management company," according to a report in the *Kansas City Star*.

Ironically, the University of Missouri-St. Louis, governed by the same board of regents, has been attempting to revoke the charter of one of its sponsored charter schools, The African American Rite of Passage Charter School, because that governing board replaced its management company with one that places decision-making power in the hands of the school's not-for-profit board.

The Illinois Charter School Facs
November 20, 2001

Nevada

Teamsters Target Education Support Workers

International Brotherhood of Teamsters President James P. Hoffa Jr. pledged to provide "expert negotiators" and other support for an effort by its Las Vegas local to represent education support personnel in the Clark County School District.

The district's 7,000 workers are currently represented by the Education Support Employees Association, an affiliate of the Nevada State Education Association and the NEA.

"We're very excited about the 7,000 members and we think things are going very well," Hoffa told the *Las Vegas Sun*.

"If this goes to an election, we'll have a bloodbath of a fight," ESEA President Robert Mancuso told the *Las Vegas Review-*

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Journal. Since ESEA makes up a full one-quarter of NSEA membership, NSEA officers pledge they'll devote many resources to the representation fight.

Education Intelligence Agency Communiqué
December 12, 2001
November 26, 2001

New Jersey

60 Percent Favor Vouchers, But Governor Doesn't

Bret Schundler's underdog bid for governor came up short, but his advocacy of publicly funded vouchers for school choice has struck a responsive cord in New Jersey.

The Eagleton-Rutgers Poll found that 60 percent of residents statewide favor vouchers, with 30 percent opposed and 10 percent undecided.

"One thing is clear," said pollster Patrick Murray. "Parents do prefer choices for children in education. In recent times, one of those things they talk about is vouchers. Support for them is high among all income levels and in all regions of the state. It is particularly high among lower-income people."

New Jersey residents with annual incomes below $25,000 favored vouchers 70 percent to 21 percent, while those with incomes exceeding $100,000 supported vouchers 55 percent to 44 percent. Support for vouchers was somewhat stronger among minority-group members (62 percent to 27 percent) than among whites (59 percent to 31 percent).

The president of the Newark-based chapter of the Black Alliance for Educational Options (BAEO), Dianthe Dawn Martinez, said residents of the state's urban and poor districts "are trapped in a monopoly of failed public schools, denied equal educational opportunity, denied the last unfulfilled civil right."

BAEO urged the state to make vouchers available to 300,000 children in 42 urban and low-income school districts.

But Governor Jim McGreevey, who took office January 15, said he has no intention of offering vouchers. Instead, he said he wants to work with business leaders to set up "career academies" in each of the state's 21 counties.

The Friedman Report
December 2001

New York

Settlement in Catholic School Teachers' Strike

In early December, the Archdiocese of New York and the Federation of Catholic Teachers reached agreement on a three-year contract that provides for an 11 percent pay raise for teachers in the Big Apple's Catholic schools. The union represents some 3,200 teachers at 235 schools in New York City.

However, at press time, the Archdiocese still had not yet reached agreement with another, smaller union called the Lay Faculty Association, which represents another 377 teachers and guidance counselors.

Initially, the Archdiocese had been offering a 6 percent raise, while some union officials were aiming for 15 percent. Catholic high school teachers make between $29,893 and $41,745 a year, while their counterparts in New York City public schools make $31,910 to $70,000.

New York Times
December 11, 2001

Tennessee

Board Member Says Poor Kids Can't Jump

State school board member Avron Fogelman of Memphis recently proposed that the board enforce lower standards for

"[A]s many as seven of every 10 Memphis students [will] not graduate because they will fail the new, tougher graduation tests going into effect this school year."

student achievement in Memphis than it does in the rest of Tennessee's K-12 government schools.

After reviewing the state's recent report cards for schools, Fogelman lamented that as many as seven of every 10 Memphis students would not graduate because they will fail the new, tougher graduation tests going into effect this school year.

"It's like a runaway freight train that will hit us in Memphis if somebody doesn't call time out," he said. "As it's going now, they're not going to have a prayer."

Memphis school superintendent Johnnie B. Watson said he liked Fogelman's idea. "I'm all for accountability," Watson said, "but the time has come that we need to stop letting half-baked testing determine what we teach and how we teach. It's controlling the school system."

According to the *Memphis Commercial-Appeal*, Watson wants to see a weighted scale that takes poverty into account when assessing a school's testing data. Other districts with high degrees of poverty would get the same break as Memphis under such an approach, he said.

But another Memphis area member of the state board, Cherrie Holden, said she didn't understand "how we can set a separate standard and expect all children to achieve the same."

The Friedman Report
December 2001

Texas

Ninth-Grade Bubble

A recent study by Jay P. Greene of the Manhattan Institute exposed dropout rates around the country as being far higher than government education agencies admit. In Houston, Texas, the study reported that almost 50 percent of children who should have graduated from government schools in 1998 dropped out instead.

But the city's graduation rate is even worse if the Greene research is carried forward, according to Elena R. Vergara, president and CEO of Houston's Community Family Centers, formerly Chicano Family Center.

By May 2000, Houston's graduation rate was down to 40 percent, even though the district was reporting only a 3.2 percent dropout rate for 2000, Vergara wrote in a *Houston Chronicle* column. The truth is obtainable from a close study of the district's annual publication, *District and School Profiles*. By taking that kind of look, Vergara may have discovered a phenomenon that will have nationwide implications for school reform. She calls it the "ninth-grade bubble."

Each year, enrollment swells by more than 5,000 students between eighth and ninth grade in Houston's government schools. But in the 10th grade, the bubble bursts, and some 8,000 students "disappear" each year. For instance, in 1997-98 Houston reported 13,625 students in eighth grade. In 1998-99, enrollment rose to 18,221 students in ninth grade. But in 1999-2000, the number dipped to 10,399 in 10th grade.

"The ninth-grade bubble is readily explained," notes Vergara. "The yearly rise in the number of ninth-grade students is directly related to the state law prohibiting students from being held back more than one year each in elementary and middle school. Upon reaching ninth grade, they lack the academic skills required in high school and fail. Some enroll another year in ninth grade, but most of these and many others drop out when they turn 16."

As social promotion is phased out over the next few years in Texas, the ninth-grade bubble may cease to exist. And if children there receive extra help to stay at grade level all along, the dropout rate may also fall.

The Friedman Report
December 2001

Vermont

Rapid Growth of Small, Independent Schools

The Vermont Independent Schools Association reports that from 1981 to 1990, only 24 new private schools were founded in the state, but between 1991 and 2000, 65 opened for business. Meanwhile, a consultant on independent schools for the state's Department of Education says the total number of private schools in Vermont has risen from 83 to 141 in the past decade.

One factor in this rapid growth seems to be concern by parents that government middle and high schools are becoming too large and impersonal.

A story by Anne Wallace Allen of The Associated Press, published in the *Rutland Herald*, tells of the founding of one such school in Ripton. After watching their children grow up in the town's small elementary school, several parents had misgivings about seeing them go off to the consolidated middle school in a distant town. So they started North Branch School, a one-room school that currently enrolls a dozen students aged 11 to 14.

"This is not an age for kids to be anonymous," said Julie Hansen, head teacher at a three-year-old independent school, Stevens School of Peacham. "It's the time they start looking outside of their family for identification. They need to have adults they can trust, who will nurture them but challenge them, who will give them reasonable boundaries."

The Friedman Report
December 2001

Virginia

Fired Felon Claims Discrimination

When officials of Richmond Public Schools in Virginia discovered that Thomas R. Shelton, a substitute teacher's aide, had been convicted of three felonies in 1990 and imprisoned for more than a year, they fired him.

According to a story in the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, Shelton proceeded to file a discrimination lawsuit against the district, saying that because blacks are disproportionately convicted of felonies, they are more likely to barred from school district employment than whites. He is seeking $500,000 in damages and reinstatement to his job.

Education Intelligence Agency Communiqué
December 3, 2001

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Tracking Spending and Student Achievement

EDmin.com and Standard & Poor's offer cost-benefit analyses

BY GEORGE A. CLOWES

While the most recent reports from the National Assessment of Educational Progress indicate student achievement has stagnated in reading, mathematics, and science for at least the past decade, other reports from the National Center for Education Statistics indicate spending on K-12 education has steadily increased during this period, and is likely to exceed $400 billion this year.

As educators call for more resources and legislators for improved student achievement, two business firms are offering help in directing improvement efforts to where they are most likely to be effective.

Since the accountability provisions of President George W. Bush's just-approved education bill require districts to benchmark and report improvements in student achievement, the analytical services offered by these two firms are likely to prove helpful to state and local school officials.

Standard & Poor's

Last May, Standard & Poor's School Evaluation Services issued individual assessments for each of Michigan's 554 school districts, combining financial and student achievement data and making comparisons versus state averages.

After further analysis of the data, S&P issued a higher level report in December, drawing new conclusions about indicators of student performance and the varying effect funding can have on improving results.

The new report, called "Statewide Insights," also highlights districts and schools that are "beating the odds" by generating above-average student results while facing challenging circumstances.

S&P's analysis of the district-level data, available for public access at www.ses.standardandpoors.com, concludes that increased spending alone is unlikely to enable all students to achieve state standards, regardless of how strong or weak a district's return on resources may be. The report raises the question of whether fundamental or structural changes may be needed to maximize the state's return on incremental spending.

For example, the analysis finds achievement gaps among disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students both within and among school systems. Some districts with relatively high performance levels show relatively low performance for economically disadvantaged students. On the other hand, some districts with above-average numbers of disadvantaged students post above-average levels of student achievement.

"This report is an important new resource, providing teachers, school administrators, parents, and students with crucial information on how to improve student achievement," said Michigan Governor John Engler.

EDmin.com

Last November, EDmin.com, Inc., a leading provider of e-learning solutions for K-12 schools and districts, launched an Internet-based Return on Investment Analysis application that allows school administrators to track education expenditures aligned to standards-based student achievement.

The ROI tool enables educators to take school district financial data and correlate resource allocations to measured gains in student learning. Educators are able to measure student achievement, report and analyze the cost of education, and track program expenditures for individual districts, schools, classrooms, and students.

"We are pleased to be able to offer a one-of-a-kind solution that supports informed, data-driven decision making by combining real-time student assessment and financial analysis resources teachers and school administrators can access from anywhere, at anytime," said Dr. Thomas Jandris, president of EDmin.com and a former director of state services for the Education Commission of the States. "Educators are now able to easily identify which programs are successful in positively impacting student learning and progress, and at what cost. This tool helps administrators to more effectively evaluate spending."

The ROI tool is made up of two applications, In$ite® and Virtual EDucation™.

In$ite® is a financial analysis and reporting tool that organizes financial information from the existing accounting system. Virtual EDucation™ is an Internet-based system for managing standards-based student assessments. It is used by school districts nationwide, representing close to one million students and 2,500 school districts.

Virtual EDucation™ allows educators to report student performance information at the student, teacher, classroom, school, district, or state level. Assessment data on student progress are aligned to curriculum standards, thereby providing grade-level expectation measurements.

Education Industry News

A sampling of education industry news from The Education Economy, *a weekly publication of the market research firm Eduventures, Inc., which conducts research on the pre-K-12, post-secondary, corporate training, and consumer markets worldwide. This copyrighted material is used by permission of Eduventures, Inc.*

Natural Selection

With last year seeing little new venture capital inflow, major legislation sidetracked after September 11, and tighter school budgets, "It could be that the best thing about 2002 will be that 2001 is over," commented Eduventures Executive Vice President Peter J. Stokes in *The Education Economy* on December 1.

In this chastened economic environment, education companies must achieve success the old fashioned way, he noted: by earning it. Their products must meet customer demands and promise customers a real return on investment.

"In 2001 we saw the economics of natural selection at work," said Stokes. "Where some firms continue to possess the metabolism of sea turtles, others have shown that they have the metabolism of houseflies. Most of the companies built on bad ideas over the past three years are gone. The result is that in 2002 we will have a stronger genetic stock in this industry, and that will enable us to build more robust companies in the year ahead."

CTB/McGraw-Hill Acquisition Complements Assessment Offerings

CTB/McGraw-Hill, a provider of educational assessment for the K-12 market, announced on December 3 that it acquired Uniscore, Inc., a test scoring company that specializes in data capture, analysis, and reporting for educational and commercial clients.

EDmin.com Offers Accountability Tools to Schools

EDmin.com, Inc., a provider of enterprise performance systems for the K-12 market, announced on December 12 it acquired Fox River Learning, Inc., a professional services and consulting group. With the acquisition, Edmin will add Fox River Learning's financial analysis, planning, and policy consulting products and services to its offerings.

Jostens Exits Recognition Business

In order to focus its resources on its school business, Jostens, Inc. will transfer substantially all of the assets of its recognition business—about 8 percent of overall sales—to Oklahoma-based Midwest Trophy Mfg., the company announced on December 4.

Microsoft Settles Product Pricing Class Action Lawsuits

As part of a settlement of more than 100 class action lawsuits that alleged the company's products were overpriced, Microsoft announced on November 20 it will provide approximately $1 billion to help make computer technology more accessible to public schools.

While still pending federal court approval, the proposed settlement agreement will span five years and will provide cash, computer hardware, software, technical assistance, and training to more than 12,500 schools and approximately 400,000 teachers.

SchoolNet Closes $5 Million Financing

SchoolNet Inc., a provider of instructional management solutions for the K-12 market, announced on November 26 it closed on $5 million in its series B round of financing. The round was led by Ascend Venture Group, LLC, and included The Princeton Review, Inc., an earlier SchoolNet investor and strategic partner.

Scientific Learning Trims Workforce

Scientific Learning Corporation, a provider of computer-based learning and reading programs, announced on November 29 it will reduce its workforce by about 20 employees, or about 12 percent. The layoffs are expected to lower operating expenses by approximately $1.7 million annually and are consistent with the company's plan to reduce operating expenses while maintaining strong revenue growth.

VIP Tone Expands E-Learning Offerings

VIP Tone, a platform provider for K-12 and small and medium-size enterprises, announced on November 15 it acquired Mercator Software Pty, Ltd. of Australia, a provider of K-12 learning achievement software and services to educators.

The acquisition strengthens VIP Tone's offering in the global education marketplace. Mercator's teacher tools are installed in 40 percent of Australian schools and in a number of U.S. school districts.

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Safety at School Involves More than Student Behavior

Tainted food and unenforced fire codes endanger students

BY GEORGE A. CLOWES

Multiple homicide incidents in U.S. public schools in 1997 led to a significant tightening of school security procedures and policies. Even though these stricter procedures could not completely prevent the occurrence of additional incidents, the number of violent deaths in U.S. schools—which already was falling in 1997—has continued to decline.

While that is no cause for complacency, sometimes more mundane matters can present serious dangers to students: for example, unsafe food handling procedures and lack of attention to fire safety codes.

The multiple murders at West Paducah High School in December 1997 prompted a call for the U.S. Departments of Education and Justice to examine school safety. By the time the first *Annual Report on School Safety* was published in October 1998, further killings had occurred in Springfield, Oregon; Edinboro, Pennsylvania; Jonesboro, Arkansas; West Paducah, Kentucky; and Pearl, Mississippi.

According to the report, an overwhelming majority of public schools in 1996-97 reported having zero-tolerance policies for offenses involving firearms (94 percent) and weapons other than firearms (91 percent). A "zero-tolerance policy" was defined as a school or district policy that mandates predetermined consequences or punishments for specific offenses.

The schools also reported they used a number of measures to increase security, including:

- requiring visitors to sign in before entering the school building (96 percent);
- closed campus to prohibit most students from leaving school premises for lunch (80 percent);
- controlled access to school buildings (53 percent); and
- daily use of metal detectors (1 percent).

Other measures included having some type of formal school violence prevention/reduction program (78 percent) and requiring students to wear uniforms (4 percent).

Just because a school is in a safe neighborhood doesn't mean it is immune to criminal incidents. For example, Bayside High School in northeast Queens, one of the safest areas of New York City, reported 53 criminal and misdemeanor incidents—including nine assaults, 21 thefts, and four robberies—in the 2000-01 school year, according to data obtained by the *New York Post*. By contrast, Boys and Girls High School in the high-crime Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn reported only 22 incidents, of which 17 involved weapons.

Boys and Girls principal Frank Mickens attributes the lower crime rate at his school to an obsession with safety, according to *Post* reporter Carl Campanile.

Zero Tolerance

While zero tolerance policies bring quick and certain penalties, the punishment sometimes seems to far outweigh the crime. For example, last November in Tarzana, California, Michael Rodriguez, 7, was suspended for one day for taking a small toy gun to school. His mother appealed the suspension, worried it might affect the second-grader's chances for future college scholarships. But PTA President Yafa Ifrah took a hard line.

"The parents support zero tolerance for weapons because children can start out with toy guns and before you know it, it escalates to real guns," she told *Los Angeles Times* reporter Karima A. Haynes. "You have to put it into their heads at a young age that guns are bad because if you don't, you will have a hard time controlling them later."

When a first-grader from Edgewood, Texas was sent to an alternative school for troubled students for 11 days in December, he found himself in a classroom all by himself since he was the only "troubled" elementary student at the school. His offense: Bringing his grandfather's 1 1/2-inch long pocket-knife to school in his backpack. After three days, he was placed in another program with children of his own age.

Hazardous Food?

In an investigation that was the subject of a series of articles last December, the *Chicago Tribune* found eating school food could be hazardous to a child's health. In a 1998 incident, at least 1,200 children in at least seven states became ill—often violently ill—after being served a school lunch of tainted burritos from RHSCO Enterprises, Inc.

"Court and government records expose glaring faults in the government regulatory system, from the initial inspection to the issuing of a recall," wrote *Tribune* staff reporter David Jackson. Inspections in 1996 and 1997 had noted sanitation deficiencies at the tortilla factory, but no food safety agency inspected the plant during the eight months in 1998 when it produced the tortillas linked to the outbreak.

According to city and school records, there have been at least 41 suspected food poisoning incidents in Chicago schools since 1999, with at least 215 children becoming ill. Records show that in 1999, 172 of Chicago's schools—about one in four—was cited for rodent infestation or droppings in food preparation areas. Sixty-two schools were cited for repeated code violations in food handling areas.

In response to the *Tribune* investigation, Chicago Public Schools CEO Arne Duncan announced a series of reforms to improve the cleanliness of school kitchens and the safety of the meals.

"Nothing is more important than the health and safety of our children," he declared. "We are absolutely committed to doing what is necessary to ensure that."

"In a 1998 incident, at least 1,200 children in at least seven states became ill—often violently ill—after being served a school lunch of tainted burritos . . ."

Fire Safety Codes

When fire safety officials identify dangerous conditions in schools, the situation is not always corrected in a timely manner, as Surfside Mayor Paul Novak discovered in Florida. Finding that serious fire safety code violations remained uncorrected in a local public school, Novak filed a class action lawsuit against the Miami-Dade County School Board in June 2000, calling on the Board to correct and remedy "life threatening violations of fire safety and other safety code requirements." (See "Children Forced to Attend Dangerous Schools," *School Reform News*, October 2000.)

In Illinois, responsibility for public school fire safety similarly lies not with fire officials but with the State Board of Education. Fire officials do not have the authority to inspect public school buildings or construction plans—but they have that authority with private and parochial schools. State Senator William F. Mahar (R-Orland Park) plans to introduce a bill this year to give fire marshals authority over school fire safety, according to *Chicago Sun-Times* reporter Brenda Warner Rotzoll.

Bomb Threats Prompt Webcam Solution

BY GEORGE A. CLOWES

In October 2000, New Hampshire's Londonderry School District was severely disrupted by numerous bomb threats, which at one point reached seven in a 10-day period. The threats not only brought fear, but also cost students valuable time in class and resulted in over $30,000 in overtime police charges.

After researching a number of options, the school district chose the WebEyeAlert security solution, which provides digital storage, event detection, and live video monitoring via the Internet. The system permitted administrators and law enforcement authorities to watch over selected areas of the school where students were leaving bomb threats as written notes and as graffiti on walls. It became fully operational on August 17 last year, just one month after WebEyeAlert was awarded the contract.

WebEyeAlert allows viewing of both live streaming video and archived video clips of student activity from any Internet-accessible PC via a secure Internet account. The ability to access any of the school's 48 Pelco cameras from the Internet allows law enforcement officers—with the school system's permission—to quickly see what's going on inside the walls of the school while sitting at their desks at the police station.

"WebEyeAlert . . . provides digital storage, event detection, and live video monitoring via the Internet."

"We have had great success with the WebEyeAlert software, and have already eliminated internal school vandalism, bomb threats, and reduced the number of false alarms," said Chuck Zappala, the district's facilities director. "Moving forward we plan to expand our use of the WebEyeAlert technology to accompany additional areas of the school."

WebEyeAlert is a division of Biscom, Inc., a pioneer in image communications technology since 1986. For further information, visit **www.webeyealert.com**.

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JUST THE FACTS: DEATH AND VIOLENCE IN THE SCHOOLS

School-Associated Violent Deaths

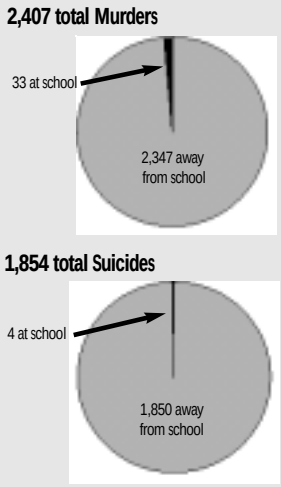
BY GEORGE A. CLOWES

From July 1, 1998 to June 30, 1999, there were 47 school-associated violent deaths in the United States, according to a report issued last December by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) titled *Indicators of School Crime and Safety, 2001*. Thirty-eight were homicides, six were suicides, two were killed by law enforcement officers in the line of duty, and one was unintentional.

Thirty-three of the 38 school-associated homicides were of children aged 5 through 19, which as a group experienced a total of 2,407 homicides during the same time period. Four of the six school-associated suicides were of school-aged children, which as a group experienced a total of 1,854 suicides during the 1999 calendar year. (Figure 1)

FIGURE 1

Number of murders and suicides
of youth aged 5-19 at school and away from school



When?
When is a violent death most likely to occur at school? After studying 253 deaths that occurred at school from 1994 to 1999, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported last August that suicides at school follow the same pattern as in the general population, with rates higher in the spring than in the fall.

However, homicides peak at the start of each semester and then taper off, according to the CDC report, "School-Associated Violent Deaths in the United States, 1994-1999." Most occurred around the start of the school day, the lunch period, or the end of the school day. In more than half of the incidents (54.5 percent), a note, threat, or other action potentially indicating risk for violence occurred before the event.

Who?
Of the 325 school-associated violent deaths occurring from the start of the 1992 school year until late 2001, three out of four were males (76.9 percent), according to a November in-house report from the National School Safety Center (NSSC). The Center updates its online report, *School Associated Violent Deaths*, on an ongoing basis.

FIGURE 2

Where School Deaths Occur: Type of School

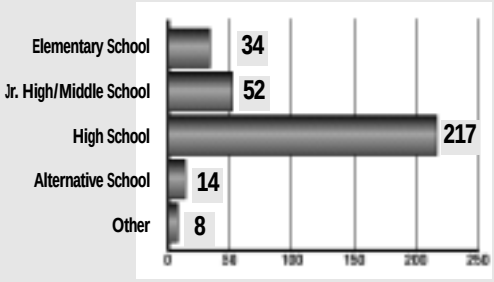
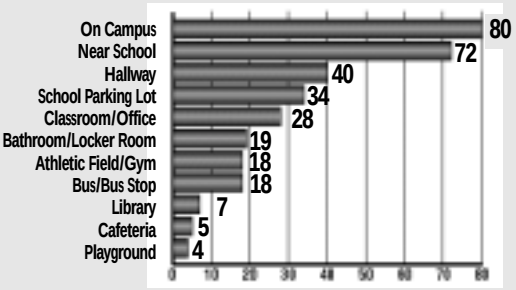


FIGURE 3

Where School Deaths Occur: Location



Where?
Two-thirds (66.8 percent) of the 325 violent deaths NSSC studied occurred in high schools, with only 16.5 percent occurring in junior high/middle schools and 10.0 percent in elementary schools. (Figure 2)

Almost 70 percent of the violent deaths took place in just four settings: on campus (24.6 percent), near the school (22.2 percent), in a hallway (12.3 percent), and on the school parking lot (10.5 percent). Fewest incidents occurred in the cafeteria (1.5 percent) and on the playground (1.2 percent). (Figure 3)

How?
According to the NSSC report, three-quarters of the deaths at school (75.1 percent) involved shooting; 13.5 percent involved stabbing and/or slashing; and 4.9 percent involved beating and/or kicking.

Why?
Unfortunately, NSSC researchers could not identify the reasons behind more than a quarter (28.9 percent) of the 325 school deaths reported in *School Associated Violent Deaths*. Interpersonal disputes were involved in 24.6 percent of the deaths; suicide accounted for another 17.8 percent; and 11.4 percent were gang-related. Hate was a motivator for only 4.9 percent of the deaths, and almost all of those occurred in a single school year, 1998-99. Even fewer incidents were sexually motivated (0.9 percent). (Figure 4)

Trend?
The year-to-year incidence of violent deaths at school is generally declining, according to the data compiled by NSSC. In 1992-93, there were 56 deaths at school; in 2000-01, there were 23. (Figure 5)

This same declining trend is reflected in the incidence of violent crime on students aged 12 to 18, according to the NCES *Indicators* report. From 1993 to 1999, the incidence of at-school violent crime—rape, sexual assault, robbery, assault, and aggravated assault—fell from 59 to 33 per 1,000 students aged 12 to 18. Away from school, the rates fell from 70 in 1993 to 39 in 1999. (Figure 6)

"Of the 325 school-associated violent deaths occurring from the start of the 1992 school year until late 2001, three out of four were males (76.9 percent) . . ."

FIGURE 4

Reasons Behind School Deaths

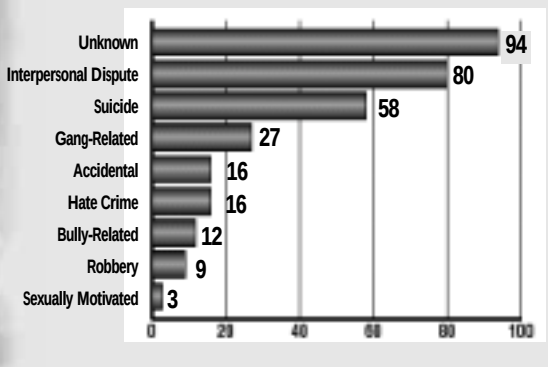


FIGURE 5

Violent Deaths at School

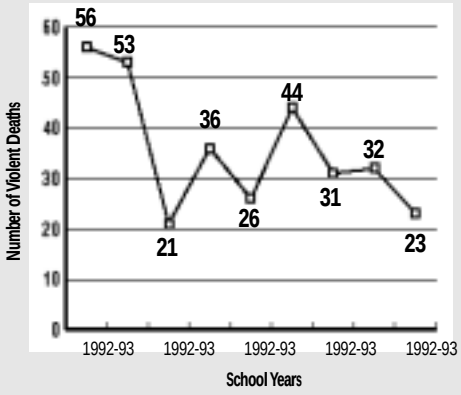
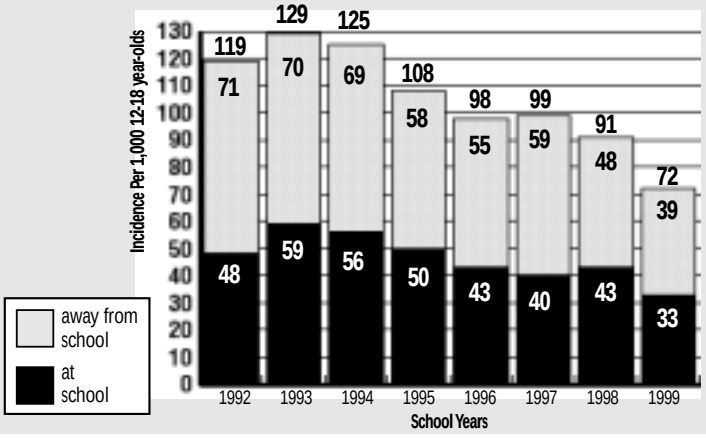


FIGURE 6

Incidence of Non-Fatal Violent Crime



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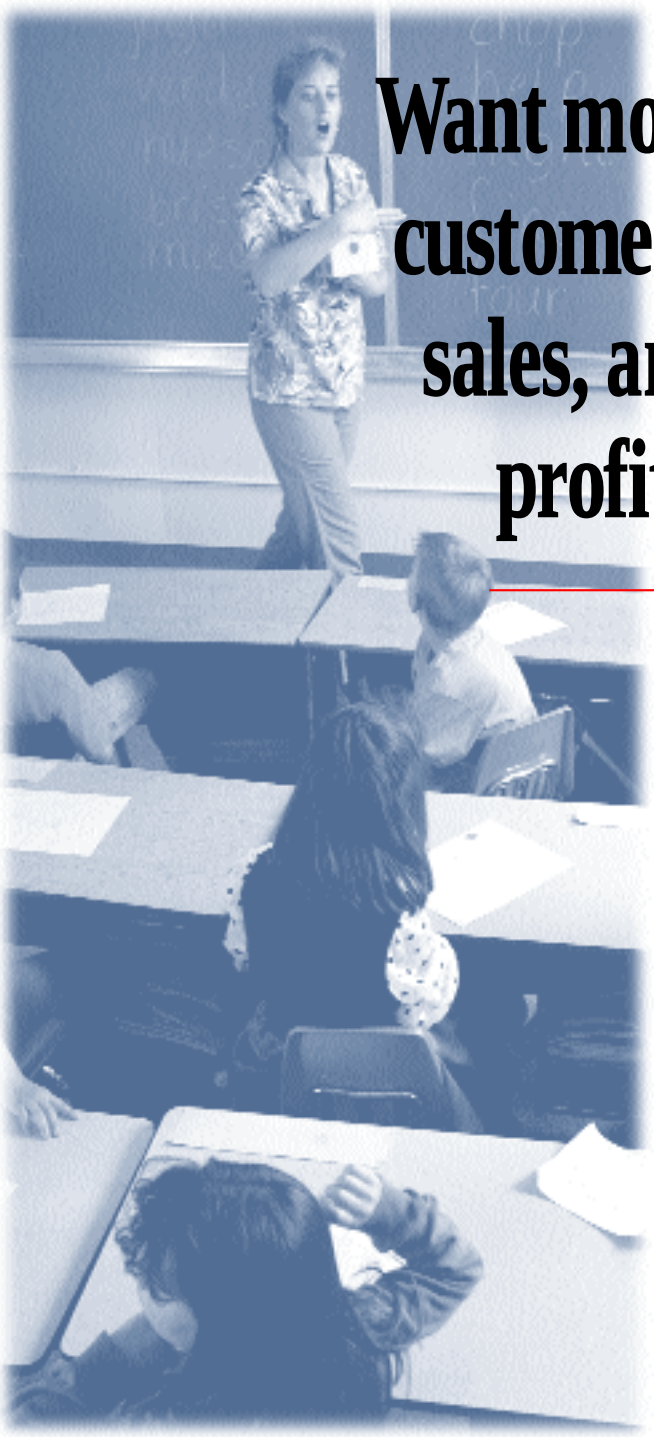

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